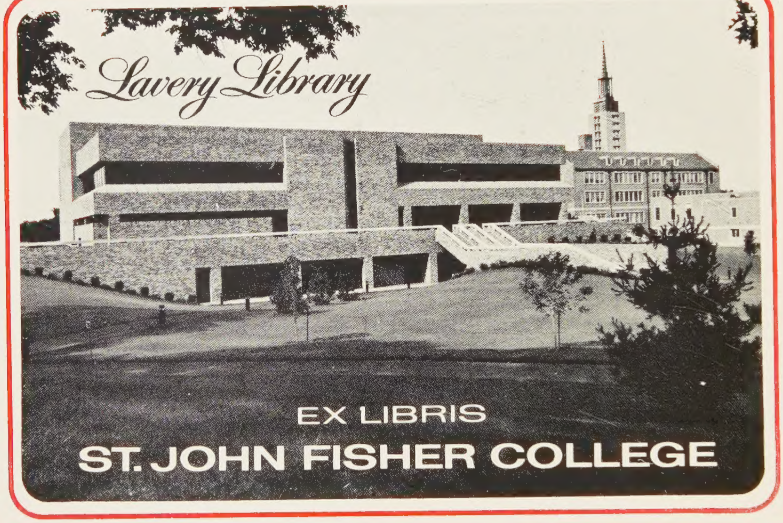

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The Modern World

III

Reactions

LITERATURE AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION

The Modern World

III

Reactions

GENERAL EDITORS

David Daiches

Anthony Thorlby

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Preface

"Not to know what happened before you were born is to remain always a child." In the 1st century B.C. this dictum of Cicero's must have seemed self-evident, and it must have seemed so in varying degrees through all the centuries covered by these volumes—until the present. Now it has been called in doubt, and often by those who traditionally were the guardians of culture, by those who used to create tradition, and by those who preserved it. What has happened?

The most self-evident truism of the 20th century is that never before has mankind possessed such mastery over nature nor had such reason to fear that that mastery will kill him. The cultural process has reflected this fact, so familiar to society from the immediate "history" of what civilization is daily becoming. Western culture can no longer be thought of, indeed, as a secure possession, an ideal achievement transcending time, readings from some immortal book. The book is being expanded at the rate of half a million new titles a year and no librarian can control them, nor any human mind retrieve what mankind knows. What was a rare and precious stone for Cicero, to be acquired by hand and handled by the few, has become an avalanche, sweeping over the masses too by means of new, instant, and ephemeral forms of communication.

Not the making of eternal things, therefore, nor the pretence that life's transient surface is truly worth commemorating, has been at the centre of this century's artistic activity. The writer has found himself in a situation with regard to the accumulated possessions from the past much like the one described by Picasso when he saw some children's drawings: "When I was their age I could draw like Raphael. . . . It has taken me a lifetime to learn to draw like them." The saying might serve as a modern answer to Cicero; it does not say that it is better "to remain always a child"—as conservatives have accused so many of the creative young of wishing to do—but it does remind us that the techniques, the books, the culture of the past can never satisfy the creative need of each new generation, of each new individual.

Thus, much modern literature has become "perversely" obsessed with itself, interested less in the world than in its own process of creativity, and interested least of all in preserving traditional culture. The revolutionary behaviour of writers and artists in the 20th century has matched in some ways the revolutionary tendencies that have erupted in society, particularly those among the young who have received from civilization's progress the leisure to consider, on an unprecedented scale, the creative demands of their own personalities rather than the material demands of their society. This has led some to identify political movements and social discontents with their own spiritual demands. The novel that draws the clearest, but most questionable, parallel between the breakdown of conventional values in society and the breaking down of traditional forms of art because of the psychological need and nature of inspiration is Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947).

The biggest *cliché* of modern literary criticism is that modern writers have had to contend with a breakdown in the established spiritual order of Western civilization, and have manfully shored a few fragments against the general ruin. In fact, T. S. Eliot lamenting the death of culture enjoyed greater cultural success than any writer who ever celebrated its life. "Culture" can be celebrated only in death; pretending it is dead is the modern way of celebrating and enhancing it. This literary device has been exploited by writers throughout Europe and America who have found, like Malraux, renewed enthusiasm at the thought that: "The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random among the profusion of the earth and the galaxy of the stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness." We must not be blind to the part played by wicked and materialistic science in reviving the religious feelings of Yeats and making his poetry as binding as it is:

> I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simpleminded religion of my childhood, I made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.

It is with the interdependence, therefore, of creativity and revolt, of culture and its destruction, of values and their rejection, that the following chapters will deal. It is *not* to be assumed that literature is doomed, let alone Western civilization, because its favourite imaginative topic is doom. Even when the literary imagination has turned its despairing gaze most desperately on itself, as Kafka does or Beckett, there is an obvious sense in which it both induces and transcends its own condition. As Sartre observed when he came to look back on the despair depicted in his famous first novel: "I was restoring with one hand what I destroyed with the other and I took anxiety as proof of my safety; I was happy."

The paradoxes to be observed in modern literature are not new. Two of the earliest works of the Western imagination describe how man was thrown out of Paradise and how a race of heroes was decimated in destroying a city to recapture a fallen woman. Nowhere does a book, a poem, a manuscript read in secret have more meaning than in countries where literature is censored and writers oppressed. No secret police has yet stifled the literary imagination, though the permissive institutions of Western education may cause it to gasp a little in the airless realms of academic study. Any such stuffiness indicates a fault in these institutions rather than in literature. It is hoped these volumes will have opened some windows onto the world outside.

THE EDITORS

CHAPTER I

Literature and Psychology

Anthony Thorlby*

I

During the year 1911 it was gradually becoming clear to the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), who had recently finished his partly autobiographical prose work *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge), that he was entering a critical period in his life. He felt unable to write, as though that book had left him, as he put it, "stranded like a survivor; my soul is a maze, with no occupation, never to be occupied again." His friends, and particularly his wife, urged him to undergo psycho-analytic treatment, because he suffered also from disorders of a psychosomatic type (so it was believed) that were a great trouble to him. Rilke corresponded with a Freudian analyst, Dr Gebsattel, discussing his doubts about the appropriateness of such treatment in his case. He explained in one letter, for instance, that he considered his writing to be already a kind of psycho-analysis. "I always have the idea that my work is really nothing but a self-treatment of this kind." It was, indeed, precisely because literature appeared to Rilke to be, as it were, a rival in the same field that he was afraid to exchange writing for clinical analysis, which he always imagined would be a "clearing up . . . a correcting of all the pages Life has hitherto written," or (on another occasion) "something perilously akin to a disinfected soul." In the end he confessed to Dr Gebsattel that his plans to become a patient

> have never really been quite serious . . . beneath my evasions I still feel bound with infinitely strong ties to all the happiness and misery my writing entails, so that, strictly speaking, I can wish for no change, no intervention from outside, as relief save that which is inherent in endurance and in the ultimate triumph. . . . Judging by my knowledge of myself it seems certain that if my devils were driven out my angels

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* Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Sussex.

> would also receive a slight shock, and you see I cannot let it come to that at any price.

Some years later Rilke noted the remarkable development of psycho-analysis in Switzerland, the country in which he had finally settled, and he used the same metaphor again to describe what he imagined must be the effect of psycho-analysis on the Swiss people themselves: "a completely sterilized Swiss whose every cranny has been swept and garnished—what kind of inner life can he have with his soul all disinfected and glaringly lit up like an operating theatre?"

Doubtless Rilke is in many ways unjust to psycho-analysis, most obviously so as regards the new school that was growing up in Switzerland. Carl Jung's view of the subconscious came to be quite as unscientific as Rilke's, and he was no less anxious to avoid the rationalistic procedures of Freud. It might also be argued that Freudian ideas were not in themselves entirely antipathetic to Rilke, who expressed similar insights in several of his poems, notably the *Duineser Elegien* (1912–22; Duino Elegies). In the third of these elegies he explores the sexual character of dreams and assumes sexuality to be an important factor already in the life of children. Again, in the eighth elegy he comes close to describing the kind of *Angst* produced by the sheer process of being born, the shock (as Freud defined it) of being separated from the womb. It would be easy enough, in fact, to list examples from Rilke, as from most other writers of the modern period, that show points of similarity with psycho-analytic theory. Nevertheless, an obvious and important difference needs to be observed: all such insights into the deeper or inner processes of the mind have a distinctive character when they appear in a work of the literary imagination. This is true not only of Rilke's poetry but more generally of psychology in modern literature. A writer necessarily stands in a different relationship to every aspect of the world from that in which any kind of scientist finds himself, and consequently a phenomenon such as the subconscious will also mean something different to a writer from what it means to a psycho-analyst. It is this distinctively literary interest in psychology that will occupy us here.

Freud once declared that he had propounded nothing not already known to the poets of the past; he had, he said, merely systematized it. Now just this attempt to reduce the phenomena of mental life to a system constitutes a significant point of difference between the mentality of science and that of art. Freud often stressed that, if psycho-analysis were to achieve the status of a science, it must demonstrate that there is such a thing as psychic determinism—that a mechanical chain of cause and effect links mental experiences with bodily events. To Freud this prospect was inspiring, because it meant that the mechanism could be controlled, and controlled, of course, from the top end (to use the image of upper and lower levels, which psycho-analysis generally employs). The darkness of the unconscious would then at last be enlightened and regulated by scientific means. To the imagination of a poet, as we have seen, the prospect was less appealing. He feared that scientific techniques applied to the deepest levels of the mind would not merely control them, but might also destroy them. Rilke imagined that, as a result of psycho-analysis, the pages of experience that life had written in the mind would be "corrected . . . and all scored over in red as in a school book." In a word, he saw the problem posed by psycho-analysis in terms of a threat to the *meaning* of experience. And it is with the meaning of experience, its tones of light and shade, of joy and sadness, its poetry and beauty and spiritual worth, that every artist is concerned.

Freud always claimed that he was responsible only for working out his scientific technique, his system of therapeutic control, and not at all for any philosophical conclusions that others might wish to draw from that system. It is the familiar excuse of the man of science, who finds himself bound (so he believes) by the necessities of pure fact; and it points to the difference again from the man of contemplation, be he philosopher or poet, who discovers in the relationship *between* himself and the world a mysterious and fascinating dimension in which he can project the inexhaustible wealth of his own speculative intelligence. In this other dimension, a dimension that imposes detachment and the distance from immediate experience necessary for imagination to operate, all facts are changed. They are changed, and not just obscured or falsified (as scientists tend to believe), because what they acquire is meaning, and meaning exists only in this dimension of depth where its presence or absence cannot be measured as a matter of fact. Any attempt to establish the psychology of meaning on a scientific basis, or to discover the psychological mechanism of meaningful experience, is likely to demonstrate that "in fact" there is nothing there. Certainly, if psycho-analysis is regarded not merely as a theory of control but also as a theory of meaning, its effect is liable to be destructive. It may easily be looked at from a different point of view from that intended by Freud, and it then appears not to increase the dominion of rational consciousness but rather to diminish the realm of meaningful mystery. Freud's technique for interpreting the symbolism of dreams and of neurotic behaviour is a *reductive* one. He works back down the dimension of spiritual meaning, dismantling the structures that phantasy has built up in the mind, until he reaches the bedrock of instinctual energy from which the meaningful impulse originally sprang. The satisfaction or frustration of instinct then appears to be the "real" meaning of mental life. It needs only a little imagination to see how destructive this technique must be when applied to the phantasies of art, or religion, or civilization itself. But it should be noted that to apply Freud's doctrine in this way is precisely an imaginative act and not a scientific one. As a general theory of meaning, Freudian psychology loses whatever claim it might otherwise have to be considered a science; it becomes quite speculative and cannot be proved.

A further point of difference between Freudian and what may be called literary psychology also needs to be explored. Freud was, of course, struck by the fact that Oedipus, in the ancient myth that Sophocles dramatized, has actually done the deeds that instinctively all men desire to do. If the fact that Oedipus for a long time remained unconscious of what he had done, and the fact that disease (a plague) resulted from this ignorance, are both understood psycho-analytically, we might very well say that Oedipus was suffering from an Oedipus complex. And the same basic motif appears doubtless in *Hamlet* and *The Brothers Karamazov* and in a little-known passage in Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* that Freud was proud of having discovered. Indeed, these writers have faced the fact that a man may wish to marry his mother and kill his father. However, this fact alone is not what lends universality of meaning to their literary works. The oedipal situation is represented and understood in a quite different way by Freud from the way in which it is understood by Sophocles or Shakespeare or Dostoyevsky. The effect of a Freudian interpretation is to suggest that an extremely primitive impulse, an infantile impulse, has been glossed over by layers of misunderstanding and disguise. Freud even assumed, in clinical practice, that once the mind came to see through the mysterious phantasies in which it had cloaked its desires, it would be able to release itself from bondage to them. He assumed, that is, that to the adult intelligence this infantile misdirection of sexual instinct would no longer have any serious meaning. To the literary imagination, however, it is just this attendant drama of meaning that is important. For Sophocles the meaning of Oedipus's situation is moral and religious; Oedipus comes to know himself not as a basically sexual being, but as a deeply sinful one. The spiritual drama in which Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky involve their oedipal heroes (if that is the right word to characterize them) is in each case different, but it is precisely the points of difference that matter, not any rudimentary similarity in their sexual impulses. This is only another way of recognizing that what interests us in literature is not the way in which the poetic richness of life may be reduced to a common basis in instinctual appetite, but rather the way in which a sense of *spiritual* significance is evoked through the recognition even of man's most base condition, through the story even of his humiliating downfalls.

Let us consider a little more closely how this "basic" sense of significance may arise in literature. How else has man's linguistic imagination formed the concept of humility than from a root-word meaning "earth"? Humility is acknowledgment of our earthly nature; and that some positive spiritual force, some virtue, can stem from this acknowledgment has been recognized by many others besides Christian preachers. If Greek tragedy has a spiritual lesson to teach, it is recognition of man's earthly limitation, which only the gods surpass. We might go so far as to say of all the earliest conventions of literature—the emotional mood of lyric poetry, the exposition, turning-point, and catastrophe of a tragic plot, and the relationship between episode and the vast vista of events in epic—that all of them remind us that what a man feels and thinks depends on the earthly situation and bodily condition in which he finds himself. The novel form, which has some claim to be considered the characteristically modern form of literature, has offered still richer possibilities for observing realistically the nature of man's limitations, and has also anticipated and rivalled the insights of psycho-analysis, even more strikingly than any of the older poets. And in doing so, each particular novel has also, of course, given its own shade of artistic meaning to these insights, evaluating them for us in imaginative and personal terms, in a way that no science can claim to do.

Now, the point at which significance in fiction and significance in psychology may be most usefully compared does not lie in literary instances of Freudian or Jungian situations, which, even where they exist, exist with an important artistic difference. The point of comparison that best shows the modern novel to be a potential rival in the field of psychology lies in the relationship of consciousness to reality, of the mental image of the world to the outward state of affairs. The novel is the literary form best adapted to explore this relationship. The novelist looks on at both the outer and the inner world from a new point of view that leaves him free to mix the effects of all previous genres, lyrical, dramatic, narrative, and so on. As a result he can juxtapose the way something feels from inside with the way it looks to a detached observer, or the way something is experienced deep in a person's psyche alongside the way he conceives of it mentally. The possibilities are endless but the technique can be described generally as one of contrast, of opposing levels of awareness; and there is a point of sometimes great similarity here to the levels of consciousness and unconsciousness that psycho-analysis uses, and to the conflict between inner and outer demands that all psychology by definition locates *within* the psyche. The novel is not especially distinguished as a medium for exploring the character of action, nor even perhaps the character of the passions, as poetry has understood them; but it offers unique types of insight into the nature of the mind, into living as a conscious experience—or, perhaps we should say, as an experience going on within consciousness. Life does not, obviously, consist solely of consciousness but of something else besides, something that by contrast is bound to seem more solid and real, something that appears to be *opposed* to consciousness—non-conscious, or subconscious, or unconscious—even though it is just this other "thing" that the mind becomes initially conscious of. So, too, the novel, in its preoccupation with consciousness, occupies itself equally with external reality in a newly distinct sense. The distinctive achievement of the novel is to have discovered not the tragic or comic or epic or lyrical character of human existence (although it may make use of these effects also), but rather that experience is psychologically hybrid, paradoxical, divided against itself, alienated. That is why the novel has often been regarded as a hybrid literary form. And the other terms associated with it tell us something further about its psychological function: the novel reveals the way we create mental "fictions," reveals our emotional capacity to "romance"—that is to say, it shows the way we shape reality in the image of our desires and fears.

Although the novel passes for the most realistic literary genre, by comparison with which most older types of writing may well strike a modern reader as so much poetic make-believe, we should perhaps note one problem connected with fiction that particularly affects its psychology. It has in general proved impossible to define the genre satisfactorily, to describe what (if any) are its necessary conventions, its perspective, its style. This is because the vantage-point from which fiction can be written—what the novelist may permit himself to see and express—is potentially quite free. Such unlimited freedom regarding what the mind can know is not, of course, a real possibility in life, however realistic the novelist may make his vision appear. It is not possible, for instance, for any mind really to survey the relationship between its image of the world and the world "in itself." There is, consequently, as much make-believe in the realism of fiction, and thus also in its psychological insights, as in the older forms of literature.

It is important to remember this in view of some marked tendencies in the fiction of the past 100 years toward a nihilistic psychology, a fascination for probing the illusory character of man's spiritual life. The impression of psychological profundity that such modern fiction creates comes from the peculiar point of view that it is assuming—a point of view that purports to let us see through the façade of a person's or a society's conscious existence to some stark and squalid reality below. The impression thus created of the mind's helplessness is likely to be quite different from the one created by older representations of men deluded by passion or circumstance. Where men were seen to have made the wrong choice, or to be wrongly informed about something external to the mind, whether this was a passion or an action, they could be held to be morally responsible and so also redeemable. Where the illusion is seen to reside in the very relationship of consciousness to reality, however, man's plight may be felt to be more profound. To take an extreme example: Kafka shows his protagonists engaged in an altogether hopeless struggle to comprehend their lives, for they cannot ever glimpse what the reader is enabled to see: namely, that no rational efforts and no emotional gestures can possibly make sense of their situation. For what they take to be a real, social situation, with which they consequently expect to come to grips in some objective fashion, is in fact a psychological one. In his novel *La nausée* (1938) Jean-Paul Sartre pretends to see through the very fabric of language, to perceive the precognitive chaos of sense impressions, the irrational physical ground of existence, on top of which the mind constructs its flimsy order of words, and concepts, and habits. Ultimately, of course, this standpoint of utter psychological detachment must cast doubt on the image presented by the literary artifact itself, for what is more arbitrary and irrational than the workings of the creative imagination? Then, the text itself is liable to become an experimental playing with words and the process of trying to represent reality a struggle with absurdity; from the standpoint of psychology, Joyce and Beckett and Grass may be said to have developed to an extreme an attitude toward experience that had been available to novelists for more than a century.

II

In this connection, as in so many others, a recognizably modern style may be found to appear around the middle of the 19th century. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856–7) was immediately greeted as an example of psychological writing more radical than anything that had been witnessed before. Now, from a traditionalist point of view, this judgment must seem odd, even false. The book is obviously rather radical in its sceptical view of human nature, but it may be doubted whether it is *spiritually* very profound. The heroine, not to speak of the other characters, is represented as too limited and unsubtle a person for there to be anything very profound about *her*. We have only to recall the sceptical insights of earlier writers to realize the difference. Flaubert's range of understanding of character and motive does not equal that, let us say, of Saint-Simon (1675–1755); nor, if it is a question of psychologically penetrating insights into egotism or *amour propre*, does he offer us any of those devastating moral observations for which, say, La Rochefoucauld is famous. The emotional and intellectual level of Emma Bovary's life hardly rises above that depicted in a women's magazine story.

Flaubert, of course, was well aware of this. He was not interested, as he often pointed out, in making *moral* observations. Consequently, none of Emma Bovary's relationships with other people is very interesting in terms of what used to be called "moral psychology." Whether she is kind or cruel, honest or false, scarcely matters to us, and we discover in her no profundities of motive or moral resolution. Flaubert makes his novel fascinating by means of a particular literary technique. He presents each moment in his story from a carefully selected angle, which gives it a symbolic significance. Many of these moments are masterpieces, and their momentary brilliance quite exceeds the conventional interest of the story as such. We recall the particular character of Emma's love through scenes at the theatre, at a village fête, on a cathedral sightseeing tour, and so on. These are important not as adventures but as symbols. The event that is being described on these occasions is rather trivial; what is meaningful is the formation of the symbol. Flaubert's technique for forming symbols is to associate emotions, usually sexual, with things and events. Emma's physical beauty is linked with the colours that shimmer on her parasol; her debauch is symbolized by a naked hand scattering torn pieces of a letter from a hired cab. Flaubert's psychological profundity lies in his vision of the way parasols and cabs become interesting through sexual desire, and sexual desire acquires a special interest from parasols and cabs. Poets have always understood and used this kind of symbolism, but Flaubert discovered a new interest, a psychological interest, in this technique by revealing the purely artificial, artistically invented, and thus *illusory** character of such symbolic meaning. His symbols have the profundity of the gaze that sees through them.

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* "The power of 'illusion' " is a phrase Flaubert sometimes used in praising literary works he

Flaubert, then, had no moral understanding of love as a spiritual energy that can be either good or bad. He had merely a psychological view of sex as an essentially meaningless, unconscious force, which acquires significance only from the circumstances in which it expresses itself. In the circumstances of Emma's world, where the name "Bovary" signified for Flaubert beefy mindlessness, every symbol is like an illusion of meaning that hovers over an abyss of banality and stupidity. Whatever sense of depth we have comes from our seeing through this illusion to the nothingness beneath. (We also, of course, notice particularly the skill of the artist; his style, his power to fabricate, manipulate, and destroy illusion is seen to great advantage against this backdrop.)

We might draw an obvious parallel here with the technique introduced by Freud to interpret the symbolism of dreams, neurotic behaviour, and other symptoms of unconscious forces at work in even the most commonplace activities of everyday life. Freud shows how very complicated such symbolism may be in its associations and disguises, but its meaning is ultimately quite primitive. Indeed, it *can* mean only one thing: a search for sexual satisfaction that has been diverted toward other goals, goals that can never provide this satisfaction; instead, they gain much spiritual complexity, the complexity of a neurotic obsession, but not, of course, any valuable spiritual depth.* But at this point we catch sight again of the difference, which we remarked upon earlier, between what the psychologist sees and what the writer sees. For precisely this missing spiritual depth is, in Flaubert's novel, painfully apparent. We may wonder how the *absence* of something can not only be apparent but actually cause a spiritual sensation; to a strictly scientific mind such as thing is impossible, a contradiction in terms, but to the imagination the force of negative awareness is an undeniably real experience. For the imagination is very little interested in the crude facts of sexual motivation; it is interested rather in the phantasies and fictions to which sexual desire gives rise. That is to say, it is interested in just that process of symbolism, the process whereby the mind endows the world with symbolic value, that modern psychology treats reductively so that it looks like "mere" illusion. The virtue of modern, psychological literature (and especially fiction) is to

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admired (*Don Quixote*, for instance). The word is ambiguous, for it has both a negative implication ("false") and a positive one ("imaginary"). This ambiguity is central to our discussion.

* The neurosis is either harmless (a socially acceptable surrogate) or else a debilitating drag—except, of course, to the analyst, to whom it is a satisfying, scientific livelihood. That its "value" is so different to patient and analyst—and the subject of quite a few jokes about payment—might be said to be the paradox that psycho-analysis ignores but literature exploits.

make us aware of the profound ambiguity in this process, a process that cannot scientifically be laid bare but is invested always with spiritual qualities (even negative ones, tragic ones, comic ones)—invested, that is, with the infinite uncertainty of man's spiritual destiny.

Thus, Emma Bovary's story is interesting to us not because of its sexual psychology, which is banal, but because of its poetic psychology; the symbolism of the novel is moving because it symbolizes the illusoriness of the imagination itself. That is why Flaubert could say: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." And that is why critics disagree, some saying the novel is psychologically cruel, some saying it is poetically moving. It is both these things. The psychological point from which it is written is undoubtedly destructive; but Flaubert makes us feel poignantly the value, indeed the beauty, of what is being destroyed. He makes us feel the negative profundity, the negative meaning, that psychology has for the poetic imagination and perhaps altogether for the human soul. Flaubert's most brilliant statement of this theme is found in his last story, *Un cœur simple* (1877), where an old spinster, who has been denied almost any satisfaction in life, finally attaches all her love to an old stuffed parrot. As she dies this tatty object seems to fly down to her with all the consoling splendour of the Heavenly Dove. For her it is the image of the Holy Ghost—but not, of course, for the reader, who sees all too clearly what this symbol is in reality.

The power of Flaubert's simple story derives entirely from the point of view from which it has been written. This is one of great psychological sophistication, which stands in the sharpest contrast to the mentality of its altogether unsophisticated human subject. The sensation of deep understanding that Flaubert produces in his reader is obviously quite impossible for the old spinster herself to experience. In the same way, in Flaubert's last unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), two simple-minded old men are represented in their last attempts to acquire some intellectual understanding of the world. Flaubert symbolizes the psychological quality of their thoughts in such a way that their whole spiritual quest appears totally pointless. Again the reader is induced to feel that he has gained a profound insight into the nature of utter shallowness. The difference between this kind of modern psychological insight and older views of ignorance or error may again be stressed. Oedipus, let us say, or Turnus or Don Quixote can all be enlightened as to the real state of affairs; Bouvard and Pécuchet can not. No book brings home to us more forcibly than this unfinished and unfinishable novel of Flaubert's just how destructive of conventional ideas and values this new psychological standpoint may prove, this point of extreme detachment from the world, at which modern writers have tried to place themselves in an attempt, as it were, to stand outside the illusion of the mind in order to see the way meaning is fabricated from within. Even the conventional forms of narrative and plot structure have broken up under the pressure of this new source of inspiration, in order to communicate more directly the discovery that psychological profundity matters more than any of the old illusions about morality or beauty in the world. Because modern literature, with its presiding psychological genius, is one of the chief means of educating the young in most Western societies, we should try to understand just why it appears so often to be destructive of the traditional values on which those societies rest, and what it offers in their place.

III

Perhaps no modern work has made a more prolonged effort to explore a whole lifetime's experience from an exclusively psychological point of view than Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27). Proust (1871–1922) repeatedly tells of his inability to produce literature of the conventional type, which always seemed to him so remote from the reality of actual experience (by which he means, of course, remote from the quality of his own inner life, his own highly introverted existence). The structure of the novel—if that is what we should call the book he eventually did write—reflects Proust's progress toward a point of view outside life altogether. This was how he interpreted the state that sickness imposed on him, and he connected his physical with his spiritual condition by means of religious similes, as though his asthma were (in his words) "a harsh director of conscience making me die to the world." Even more strikingly mystical was his way of interpreting the excitement aroused in him by moments of spontaneous memory, moments, as he felt, of "communication" with what he believed to be the "essence of things" through the medium of some physical sensation. Then the vista of his inner life lay open before him and he declared that he stood "outside time"; from this point of absolute spiritual vision he seemed to possess at last something that life had otherwise withheld.

What was this precious prize? Clearly, something much more was involved than the rather commonplace objects that were the occasions of these acts of memory (a cup of tea and a biscuit, a row of trees, an uneven bit of pavement). Nor was it any of the persons Proust had known and loved who made him happy in recalling them; so the title of the English translation—*Remembrance of Things Past*—is perhaps misleading if it suggests that Proust set any value on the memory of some dear friend. (Friends, as he bluntly states on a number of occasions, merely distract a writer from his art; they are a waste of time.) What made Proust so ecstatically happy was the satisfaction of a purely inner need, an event so entirely inward that we may justifiably use of it the modern concept "psychological." This is, indeed, the word Proust himself repeatedly uses, and the underlying conviction of his vast work is comparable with that of Freud: namely, that a basic psychological law must determine all man's mental activity. In one of his moments of ecstatic revelation Proust suddenly had a perfect vision of the way this psychological law operates. He describes the matter as follows:

> How many times in the course of my life had I been disappointed by reality because, at the time I was observing it, my imagination, the only organ with which I could enjoy beauty, was not able to function, by virtue of the inexorable law which decrees that only that which is absent can be imagined. And now suddenly the operation of this harsh law was neutralized, suspended, by a miraculous expedient of nature by which a sensation—the sound of a spoon . . . an unevenness in two paving stones—was reflected both in the past (which made it possible for my imagination to take pleasure in it) and in the present, the physical stimulus of the sound or the feel of the pavement giving to the dreams of the imagination the one thing they usually lack, the idea of existence. . . .

If we wanted to reduce Proust's elegant formulation to a crude formula, we might say: a thing looks attractive only so long as you do not have it; once you have it, you no longer see anything in it, because the reality leaves no room for your imagination. The effect on memory of a taste or a sound or a smell produces a miraculous solution of Proust's problem: then you have the sensation in reality together with a picture of some past occasion that is purely a mental image, purely in the mind, and thus ideal—and yet as physically immediate as though it were real.

All Proust's profundity is grounded in the same perception: that the mind loves only what it does not have. The typical Proustian motivation is therefore what is conventionally called "jealousy"; but the manifestations of this passion in Proust's world are rather different from anything comprehended by old-fashioned moral psychology. Indeed, older literature generally has nothing to show that is like it, for the actions associated in the past with the deprivation of a love object were most often violent and to be judged therefore under such well-known moral headings as envy, hatred, treachery, and so on. In the politely restrained society that Proust observes, nothing so overtly vicious occurs. What he sees happening is precisely that introversion, or inward turning, of desire that psychoanalytic jargon terms "frustration." Although Freud did not use this rather inexact term, he made a quite similar assumption to the one that inspired Proust: namely, that the mechanism of the mind is charged with only one type of energy, which is basically sexual, and that all the so-called "higher" pleasures of the mind are disguised satisfactions, "aim-inhibited modifications" (to use a Freudian phrase), of this primal impulse. They are stimulated in the mind by the experience of not being able to have what is desired, and the substitute happiness that they offer is never entirely satisfying, so that a state of restless self-torment continues, which Freud called "neurotic."

The point in this theory that is perhaps of greatest interest for literature is Freud's discovery—if that is what it is, and not rather a misrepresentation of an older and profounder spiritual truth—that the basic energy of the psyche can transfer itself from one object to another. In other words, Freud realized that the mind is capable of feeling an emotional similarity between quite different things, and of transferring emotional desire from one object to another; moreover, this is precisely the mental process that produces similes and metaphors and symbols in literature. Freud, of course, reduces their meaning too mechanically to sex, without even considering whether the possibility of "transferring" sexual instinct to the plane of consciousness does not totally transform "the" meaning of sex. Proust does not make so crude a reduction of meaning, but he nonetheless uses his analysis of frustrated desire to draw frequent similes to other spiritual activities that he understands on the same psychological basis. The range of his similes and metaphors is immense, and implies a psychological interpretation of many of the most important cultural values of Europe. One example must suffice. As Proust walks in the Bois de Boulogne and realizes that the post-war fashions of the women no longer strike him as elegant, as in the days when he was in love with the magnificent Madame Swann's daughter, he likens his experience to the nature of religious doubt:

> They were just women, in whose elegance I had no belief, and whose clothes seemed to me to be without meaning. But when a belief vanishes there survives it—more and more ardently, so as to cloak the absence of the power, now lost to us, of imparting a higher reality to new phenomena—an idolatrous attachment to the old things which our belief in them did once animate; we become superstitious

> about them, as though the divine spark had resided in them and not in ourselves, and as though our faithlessness in the present were the result of some outside occurrence, namely, the death of the gods.

This passage is poised, like so many of Proust's intricately balanced periods, like the motionless immensity of his whole book, between joy and despair. It tells us we should not despair at the death of the gods; for the divine is in us. But it reminds us too that we grow old and lose our faith; and with the sobriety of cold understanding we realize that the reality of the gods was an effect only of our passion. The paradox of Proust's *œuvre* is that essentially the same psychological law is the cause of both his moments of ecstatic happiness and his lifelong experience of unhappiness. For what his long *recherche* into his own past chiefly establishes about real life is "the psychological impossibility of happiness"; and the impossibility not only of finding happiness, but of finding any real beauty, or goodness, or truth in the world. It was because he could not believe in the real existence of these qualities that he could for so long not think of becoming a writer. Then came those moments of ecstatic memory, whose meaning eventually grew clear to him. He discovered that he could possess in memory the happiness that he could not possess in real life. Or probably it would be more accurate to say: he could possess it in art. For memory itself, unassisted by imagination, generally does not enable us to possess anything so very different from what we experienced at the time. Ordinary, everyday remembrance may arouse nostalgia in us, or sadness at time's passing, but Proust is not concerned with any such personal affections. His ecstasy has the transcendent, more-than-personal quality that has always been taken by artists as proof that their inspiration came to them from heavenly muses. What Proust describes as the psychology of memory surely characterizes more accurately the psychology of art: the coming together of reality and imagination, of world and idea.

Should we conclude, then, that Proust has rediscovered one of the ancient mythological ideas about literature: that the goddess of memory is the mother of the muses? If he has, then we should notice that he has changed the significance of this idea. To Homer it meant simply that he asked to be allowed to see what had really occurred, for the spectacle, he had no doubt, was an inspiring one. Proust does not believe that the spectacle of human behaviour is ever inspiring in any conventional sense; it is to him *psychologically* interesting. Moreover, the experience that reveals to him the ultimate meaning and aim of human psychology is a moment of artistic inspiration; maybe it came to him in a moment of memory, but the moment clearly meant much more to him than the past itself had ever done. In other words, Proust understands all human experience by reference to the psychology of creative experience. It is even downright misleading to associate this with the process merely of memory, for it might prompt us to assume that Proust is telling us only the truth about the world he had known. In fact he is not telling us much more about it than, say, Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein tells us about Gertrude Stein. What that painting expresses is the fruit of Picasso's repeated attempts, and failures, to find a satisfying style in which to render the portrait; the final painting refers less to the woman who sat for him than to the process and problems of cubist expression. Proust's novel similarly expresses the fruit of his attempts and failures to love his fellow human beings; and it tells us less about them and even about him as they were in reality than about Proust's preoccupation with the psychology of literary observations. Thus, when Proust pronounces upon "the psychological impossibility of happiness," he is expressing a psychological problem that primarily affects an artist. For it *is*, doubtless, impossible to be both actor and onlooker at the same time; and doubtless too in actual experience we do not possess as profound an idea of what our life means as that which a writer may express. Where Proust is misleading is in judging that therefore we possess nothing; he judges this way because he judges from the standpoint solely of artistic expression. The paradox of his artistic psychology is such that the possession of greatest happiness in art is achieved at the price of denying it in life, and the impression of greatest profundity at the price of exposing the illusoriness of any meaningful thought about the world.

It has doubtless always been the case that writers, for the most part, have led contemplative rather than active lives, and in that sense they could often be said to have been "outsiders." We think of Homer blind, Virgil a delicate intellectual, Dante wretched in exile. What has changed, however, is the writer's understanding of his situation and of his art. We shall scarcely exaggerate if we say that he has come to understand not only the spectacle but the essential experience of living in the image of his own psychology, on the basis, that is, of what he intuitively knows to be the prime concern in *his* life, namely, writing. The result has been an ever-increasing volume of literature that derives its main source of inspiration from the psychology of creativity; and what it mainly has to tell us about the society in which we live, and any of the more conventional things we might do in it, is that they are totally uncreative. The word that existentialist philosophy has made popular to describe this deficiency is "inauthentic," a word that derives its meaning entirely from the sphere of art.

It means "not belonging to an author's work." It used to be applied to passages in a text that seemed to lack the authentic inspiration of the author to whom they were attributed. It is the lack of this inspirational quality in civilized social life that has made so many Western writers critical, sceptical, desperate for more than a century, and now justifies generations of young people in a similar state of mind when they study their works at school. Has the time come when we should try to see more clearly the *point of view* from which this psychological criticism of society is made?

IV

There are several reasons why the psychological interests of modern writers should have involved them also in a criticism of society. This type of psychological criticism, it may be stressed again here, is not the same as moral criticism of the things individuals actually do in that society: psychological criticism concerns rather the ideas and values on which social convention is based. One reason why psychological and sociological criticism may tend to join hands is that they have a common origin in philosophical theory: Marxism and Freudianism are cousins in the same line of German thought. Of course, few writers in Europe have had the training or the inclination to make use of such theoretical connections, but in the German cultural world we find quite frequent references to this philosophical background, for instance in the writings of Thomas Mann and of Robert Musil. We may quote a passage from Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930–43; The Man Without Qualities) in order to show what their chief connection is, and to show also the highly theoretical jargon in which the matter is inevitably discussed. The scene is a reception for intellectuals in the house of a Viennese hostess, where a general and an aristocrat, representatives of the old social order that they know to be threatened, listen in perplexity to the exchange of *avant-garde* ideas and then compare notes:

> "There's one of these Marxist chaps over there," Stumm [the general] explained, "so to speak asserting that a person's economic foundations entirely determine his ideological superstructure. And there's a psychoanalyst arguing with him. *He* says the ideological superstructure is entirely a product of the instinctual foundations."
>
> "It's not as simple as all that," Ulrich said, wishing he could escape.
>
> "That's just what I say! But it didn't do any good," the General immediately went on, not taking his eyes off Ulrich.
>
> But Leinsdorf [the Count] now entered the discussion. "Now

> there, you see," he said to Ulrich, "is something rather like the question I was just going to raise myself. Apart from whether the foundations are economic or sexual or whatever these fellows may think—what I was going to say just now is this: why are people so unreliable in their superstructure? That's it, you know. As the poet has it, 'it's a mad world, my masters!' Sometimes one comes near to thinking it's literally true."

Musil himself does not, of course, believe that either of these pseudo-scientific theories can establish the true relationship between ideas in the mind and facts in the world. That is why his hero, Ulrich, is so evasive. But although he may be sceptical about such theoretical explanations, Musil is well aware that the truth about this relationship has become very confused, and that this is likely to be an acute psychological problem for any sensitive individual. The central problem of Ulrich's life is, in fact, to relate in some meaningful way the "superstructure" of his intelligence to the "substructure" of his emotional and practical existence, although such jargon would obviously be inadequate to express the experiences that gradually bring him closer to this goal of inner balance or psychological wholeness. Musil also recognizes that a corresponding lack of balance or wholeness threatens the social order. One of the brilliant satirical inventions of the novel is a social movement that Musil calls the "Parallelaktion." This movement, in which the Austrian people are to participate alongside the Germans, is meant to express and glorify the spirit of the nation. What could possibly do this? Austria seems to consist of endless groups and factions, each with its own idea of what matters most. No formula of words commands general assent, except the woolliest slogans. Yet everyone feels a need for action. When ideas are so maladjusted to reality, the situation will appear critical to a sociologist no less than to a psychologist; and to a writer it will present rich possibilities for irony, satire, conflict, and so on. Musil sets his novel in the year 1913, and the deadline for the completion of the "Parallelaktion" is 1918; although he never wrote the part of the book that dealt with the outbreak of World War I, no modern reader will forget that by 1918 the combined action of the German and Austrian peoples had destroyed the social order they set out to glorify.

It is tempting to consider as a further reason why psychology has turned against 20th-century society the "fact" that many social values and institutions, which modern Europe had inherited from earlier centuries, were no longer adjusted or adequate to the new realities of mass, urban, industrial society. In truth, we should distinguish between what was the case and what was believed to be the case; the latter is the necessarily limited sphere of psychological analysis. (Indeed, whether the ideals of a society are genuine or sham, adjusted to reality or a mere façade, is a matter not simply of fact but of value judgment.) Granted this limitation, however, it is possible to observe two phases of public reaction to an event such as the 1914–18 war, both of which may be judged as evidence of a psychological maladjustment between convention and reality. The first is the widespread jubilation throughout Europe at the outbreak of hostilities. Even writers of the stature of Rilke and Gabriele D'Annunzio voiced this mood, which must surely be interpreted as a feeling of relief that the sham façade of peacetime existence was to be replaced by the realities of war: courage, solidarity, adventure. The psychological effect of the war was to dwarf the social divisions and political tensions in France, Germany, and Italy, at least for a time. Then a second reaction occurred. The greater reality of war turned out to be very different from what was expected—or so, at least, it gradually came to be believed. (In fact, the letters of some soldiers suggest that the morale of surprisingly many men remained intact, just as the most recent historical research has made it look unlikely that Germany's political intentions could have ended in anything but a war.) What came to be believed, especially in the decades following the war, was that the war had been somehow unnecessary, a pointless slaughter that the politicians had overlaid with outdated rhetoric about heroism and honour. This is the point at which writers chiefly aimed their attack: the language used to justify and carry on the war did not express the true horror of what was happening. Wilfred Owen, Henri Barbusse, Ernst Toller, all tried to bring home to their readers the reality of what men are in order to make them see that soldiers were being subjected to an inhuman fate, which made a mockery of all conventional values. Erich Maria Remarque's best-seller *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929; All Quiet on the Western Front) preached the same message 10 years after the end of the war (at the same time as Robert Graves' *Good-Bye to All That* and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*). Beside the awful reality of what had been suffered, not even the simplest concepts such as "friend" and "foe" could be meaningful. The success of Remarque's book throughout Europe, where it sold two and a half million copies in 18 months, reflects one common form of psychological reaction to the facts of the first great modern war.

Rather than attempt to decide whether war with modern weapons is really less heroic than war in previous ages, we may note that a part at least of this question concerns the psychology of literary realism. Homer and Virgil are certainly not insensitive to the terror and horror of war, and they know that death is a great equalizer of friend and foe; but their epic style does not suggest that they are "critical" of war or of the concept of heroism. Criticism of the *quality* of an experience involves a psychological problem: the relationship, as we have said, of an external fact to a subjective reaction, which the novel writer is in a much better position to perceive than is the epic poet. One of the most frequent uses to which novelists have put this possibility presented by their medium is social criticism, which might often be more appropriately named psychological criticism. Thus, the sense that war is in fact not really at all like what social and literary convention has led us to believe began not in the trenches of Flanders but 100 years earlier in the mind of Stendhal. The hero of *La chartreuse de Parme* (1839; The Charterhouse of Parma) looks in vain for the *grande bataille* of his dreams on the field of Waterloo; just as Julien Sorel, in *Le rouge et le noir* (1830; The Red and the Black), remarks of the experience of love: "Ce n'est que ça." It is this psychological awareness of what love and war are not, i.e. *not* what heart and mind expected, that determines the realist novelist's observations as to what these things really are.

Here, then, we discover a third reason why psychology in literature has tended to be subversive of social values. This kind of psychological writing has been developed through the medium chiefly of realist fiction, which allows a peculiar mixture of high and low, inner and outer perception, and of which the point of freshest inspiration lies (or lay) precisely in the opportunities for achieving striking contrasts and ironies. The primary subject-matter of realist writers was life in contemporary society. Psychology provided the dimension of depth for this spectacle, the basic contrast between what society expected and pretended life to be like, and what it really was. Already by the end of the 19th century, the psychological structure of so-called naturalistic fiction was becoming stereotyped, as may be seen in such a hack exponent of the genre as Guy de Maupassant (1850–93). His novel *Une vie* (1883; A Life) may serve as an example. The heroine has a convent education, high moral and sentimental expectations of life, and an equally high position in society; through marriage she is exposed to a great deal of low behaviour, first from her husband, then from her son. She even has to discover that her own parents had not lived up to the image she had of them. Needless to say, the exposures are all more or less concerned with sex. Now, the only point of psychological interest that arises out of this banally sensational story concerns the validity of the heroine's cultured upbringing. It is its psychological, rather than its moral, validity that is being put to the test. Morally, we might still conclude that most of the people who do wrong come to a sticky end, and that kindness of heart does count for something. Psychologically, however, the novel makes clear that it is "better," or perhaps we should simply say "healthier," not to have any very high-minded ideas. The heroine is contrasted with her maid, who suffers similar sexual experiences, but with no sense of shock. And the message is driven home by a further contrast between an easy-going, pleasure-loving priest who does a limited amount of good and his successor who has illusions about stamping out sin and does a lot of harm.

Again and again in his stories Maupassant focusses on the image in the mind that sustains a person's life and that reality eventually destroys. This is the psychological point of so many little stories, like that of the student who lives blissfully through every discomfort while he adores an actress from afar, but leaves her boudoir a broken man after she at last lets him in. For in that night he has lost, in the words of the title, "an honest ideal." Or there is Bertha, in the story that bears her name, who is a beautiful moron. She has no intelligence, and hence no illusions, until by way of an experiment a doctor succeeds in getting her married; he then observes the birth of a few simple Pavlov-type expectations and reactions to the physical stimuli of love. When these barest beginnings of a mental idea are betrayed by her husband's infidelity, Bertha goes out of the little bit of mind she had acquired. Many other examples might be cited, but we may conclude by noting the difference between the moral and the psychological implications in one of Maupassant's best-known stories, "La Parure" (The Jewels). The heroine ruins her life for the sake of some jewels, which turn out to be made of paste. These expensive-looking symbols of social elegance and position could symbolize a moral judgment on the sham, soul-destroying virtue of wealth. But Maupassant has constructed the story in a way that lends greater emphasis to the psychology of shame, self-respect, and indeed honesty. The heroine ruins herself because she is honest and feels she must replace what she has lost. It is her moral idealism that both keeps her going and, because it is founded on an illusion, destroys her.

Freud observed that it was evidently impossible for people to live without the help of what he called "auxiliary constructions," a phrase that he said he borrowed from the novelist Theodor Fontane. He might have borrowed it, or at least the idea it is meant to convey, from almost any writer at the turn of the century or since. The only significant differences that can be discovered in the psychology of modern realist writers concern their attitude toward the fragile constructions of the mind; some delight in breaking them down, some come to accept them as indestructible, and some distinguish between those that are good and worth preserving and those that are pernicious. Many stories of Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), for instance, show minds shut in on themselves, wrapped about in consoling but illusory thoughts, preserving an image of the self and of the world that blinds them to the harsh reality. For reality is, in this psychological context, whatever challenges the security of the mind; it is defined negatively; it is the thing that contradicts and disillusions. Consider this passage from Chapter 18 of Chekhov's *Ward No.6* (1892):

> "So this is real life," thought Andrei Efimich, and he felt frightened. The moon and the prison, and the nails on the fence, and the far-away flames at the bone-charring factory were all terrible. . . . Andrei Efimich assured himself that there was nothing special about the moon or the prison, and that everything in time will decay and turn to earth, but he was suddenly overcome with despair; he clutched at the grating with both hands and shook it with all his might. The strong grating did not yield.

The speaker is the former superintendent of a hospital, who now finds himself confined to the ward for the insane, a place where the patients are treated with barbaric cruelty; Andrei Efimich has for years immersed himself in "philosophy and culture" instead of attending to the appalling conditions in his own hospital. Now he must discover what "real life" is and the discovery soon kills him. Soviet critics consider, of course, that Chekhov shows himself to be an exemplary "socialist realist" in such stories, but it should be stressed that this realism is effective for psychological rather than for political reasons. Indeed, Thomas Mann may well be right in his beautiful last essay on Chekhov (*Essays of Three Decades*, 1947) when he suggests that the profoundest moments in Chekhov's writings are those when he evokes a sense of the reality that no man can comprehend or alter: the reality of time and of death. Is it not something of this reality that breaks through the protective lining of social rules and regulations of "The Man in a Case" (to name another of Chekhov's stories), when he hears the youthful, mocking laughter of his would-be bride? For youth too has something of that mystery of life that the mind cannot master, and the young in Chekhov's writing have a spontaneous idealism that may, of course, presage revolution, but that seems, psychologically speaking, to have more to do with their natural vigour and beauty than with any political understanding. Just how questionable it is to take Chekhov's psychology, which is characteristic of the kind of psychology to be found throughout modern realist literature, as though it were solely and entirely a critique of society, may be gauged from Tolstoy's comments on "The Darling." The psychological point of this story is obvious: a woman's mind will spontaneously adapt itself to the opinions of the person she loves. If she does not love, she has not enough spiritual resources to make sense of her life on her own. Chekhov sees that this quality is precisely what makes women so lovable. Tolstoy's comment—which he surely would not have made as a young man—was that the story showed how lamentably lacking in education Russian women were.

If women and love can also be said to embody "the real" for Chekhov, should we not modify our definition of reality as a psychologically negative concept, as that which is simply opposed to the phantasies of the mind? The problem here is perhaps that the word *negative* has moral connotations that are irrelevant in a psychological context. To the modern literary imagination, which is, as we have suggested earlier, preoccupied above all with the creative process itself, and uses its own experience of writing as a psychological model by which to understand all human behaviour, it makes no difference whether the breakthrough to some inspiring awareness of the world involves a "good" or a "bad" experience from a moral point of view. Not even conventional notions of what is beautiful or ugly matter, except negatively. That is to say, ugly and immoral experiences are probably more capable in the modern period of producing that shock by which the artistic mind feels it has broken the bonds of convention and encountered reality; but beauty and goodness, too, may be experienced in circumstances that revive their appeal. Thus, Chekhov uses narrators to tell some of his stories, such as "The Man in a Case," and a similar story called "Gooseberries," in which an ex-civil servant (the narrator's brother) has become so obsessed with his idea of becoming a country gentleman that he can no longer taste that the gooseberries from his "estate," which he eats with such relish because of what they signify, are in reality quite sour. The narrators of these two stories are friends; one is a veterinary surgeon and one a school-teacher. To Chekhov they are symbols of spiritual independence and enlightenment, men who stand outside the kind of social prejudices and preoccupations they describe. (It may be doubted, however, whether their psychological liberation comes to them from their professions so much as from the fact that they have been endowed with the vision of a writer, namely Chekhov!) For them the world is beautiful, especially the Russian landscape where they hunt; the story "Gooseberries," which describes the illusions of an utterly insensitive person, shows the narrator at the beginning having a swim and revelling in the true pleasure afforded by nature. The psychology of his pleasure is contrasted —in the writer's imagination—with the sourness of his brother's gooseberries.

The general tendency of this psychological interest in realist literature has been to lend a special kind of value to persons and experiences lying outside the sphere of conventional social approval. The outsider or criminal roles that Romantic writers had idealized came to be seen by realists in more objective terms, but this only heightened their imaginative appeal, even if it lowered their moral status. Sir Walter Scott already knew that to find the kind of passions that figure in great poetry one would have, in modern society, to look among the inmates of a prison (see his Preface to *The Heart of Midlothian*, 1818). He preferred to represent such things, however, in the ennobling disguise of an earlier historical period. Balzac and Tolstoy were more bold, and among their greatest figures are the criminal Vautrin and the adulteress Anna Karenina. It is important to note the effect of these social definitions. Literature has always told stories about moral wrongdoing, but one would not normally think of Prometheus or Orestes as criminals, nor of Dido or Phaedra as adulteresses. This does not mean that their moral transgression is any less real to us. On the contrary, it is more real because the ancient authors persuade us that these heroes and heroines have offended the gods, that they have tried to break the necessary order of the world. Vautrin and Anna have merely broken a social code; moreover, the psychological quality of their experience is more real than the kind of conventional life carried on around them. They have both gained in psychological "depth" what they have lost in traditional heroic stature. Psychologically, we sense that the energies of aggression and sexual desire are a truer expression of the world order than the taboos that civilized society erects to contain them.

V

Although modern literature has shown us how to test the psychological quality of experience, to contrast the image of the mind with the reality in the world, and thus to challenge the façade of social convention with a deeper understanding of life, it would be wrong to suppose that we could learn from literature any revolutionary lesson about how we should change our lives or our society. The writer's moment of spiritual revelation, of insight into the true reality of existence, usually comes in a manner that cannot be lived. In this sense, the psychology of modern literature must be accounted, from a social point of view, pessimistic and conservative. This conservative pessimism is the result not so much of political persuasion as of artistic psychology. In no writer is it more strongly marked than in Thomas Mann (1875–1955), for whom all deeper psychological understanding is liable to cripple a man's capacity for leading a normal bourgeois existence. He illustrates clearly the point we made earlier: namely, that the character of depth—as opposed to moral character—derives neither from the passions nor from the actions of a person's life, but from the point of view from which he sees life. Depth is a sensation induced by the height of one's own detachment from the process of existence. It makes very little difference to the psychological quality of this sensation whether the social forms of existence appear attractive (as for Tonio Kröger) or unattractive (as for Thomas and Hanno Buddenbrook); the psychological incapacity of the observer to enter into that society is the same. Moreover, any attempt to overlook the psychological limitations of this position of "superior" understanding is likely to be disastrous. Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (1911; Death in Venice) shows what happens to an artist who believes he has actually found in life an embodiment of the ideal beauty he has loved and striven for in his art. The power of this psychological tale lies in the brilliant contrast that is revealed between the life the hero thinks he is leading and the life he is actually leading: it is in reality leading him to moral and physical suicide. Again, in *Der Zauberberg* (1924; The Magic Mountain), there can be no doubt about the devastating psychological profundity of Naphta's ideas (they are derived from Nietzsche). This man exposes the spiritual superficiality of the assumptions and aspirations of Western society by showing that a rationalized materialistic happiness is not what human beings really want. But, of course, only the inhuman eye of a Nietzsche-Naphta will see the façade of social values in this way or discover such depths of discontent behind it. If that eye should cease to be purely contemplative and imagine that its insights could lead to political action, then the result, Mann foresees, will be catastrophic: it will be a totalitarian terror. The extent to which Mann was prepared to use a psychological explanation of Fascism in Germany is apparent from his last great novel, *Doktor Faustus* (1947). There the German people are represented as searching in politics for a similar kind of inspiration to that which a modern artist needs for his art; psychologically these needs are the same, although there is a world of *moral* difference between their expression in art and their expression in politics. In an essay Mann even went so far as to speak of "brother Hitler," implying that the Nazi leader had attempted to realize through political action something spiritually akin to what a writer seeks through literature.

Perhaps only one novelist ever achieved a profounder understanding of the limits of psychology, what one might call the "psychology of Psychology," or in simpler terms what kind of man is likely to have this form of intelligence and what kind of life he is likely to lead. That novelist is Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–81), the writer of whom Nietzsche said that from him alone could he have learnt something, and from whom Mann did learn, borrowing the central scene of *Doktor Faustus*, where the Devil visits the hero, from *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). Not only is the figure of the intellectual among the most interesting in all Dostoyevsky's writings, but the type of intelligence these intellectuals display is pre-eminently one based on psychological insight. They challenge the façade of social, moral and religious values in the world; they destroy it as a mental illusion; and they end by effectively destroying themselves and the stability of their own minds. Their idea of ideas as no more than illusions is itself represented as an illusion by Dostoyevsky. That is why there is an inspired appropriateness in the scene where Ivan Karamazov is not sure whether he has conversed with the Devil. He has heard his own ideas, he has seen in his state of delirium the image of himself; certainly it looks like the Devil, but because he does not believe in such religious figments, his mind can relate its own doubts to nothing outside itself and collapses into madness.

Already, in one of his earlier stories, *Notes from Underground* (1864), Dostoyevsky had rehearsed the psychological problem of the intellectual, one who has the greatest scorn and loathing of society as it actually is, together with contempt for any plans for social reform. It is a strange story, having scarcely any plot, and appearing to be unfinished. (We have remarked earlier that extreme concentration "in depth" on psychological as opposed to moral questions tends to disrupt the plain narrative sequence, or plot structure, on which the older epic and dramatic genres depended. Many modern writers have demonstrated that it is possible to produce works that are still recognizably novels or plays despite this disruption of the traditional form. The form that has suffered least distortion, and lent itself best to the essentially inner, non-active revelations of psychology, is the short story.) The experiences of an intellectual do not suffice in themselves to make a novel of the conventional sort. For, as Dostoyevsky's underground man observes: "A novel needs a hero, and all the traits for an anti-hero are what have been deliberately gathered together here." Indeed, the way things are represented in books, their idealization of experience, their plans for improving life by means of programmes and principles and explanations, this is all mere "fiction" to the intellectual anti-hero. He believes we have become blinded by such fictions to our real condition as living beings, and he anticipates Freud in suggesting that this blindness is a cause of sickness in all civilized men: "We are all divorced from life, we are all cripples, every one of us, more or less. We are so divorced from it that we feel at once a sort of loathing for real life, and so cannot bear to be reminded of it."

We are confronted again here by the problem of what is meant by this definition of "real life." It is a psychological definition as Dostoyevsky presents it, for he goes on to make clear that real life is the opposite of the fictions in books and more particularly of any "generalized idea." We are bound to ask: how can we *know* that we have encountered real life, if all forms of knowledge are in some degree fictitious? The problem resembles the one that pervades Freud's work: how can we become conscious of the unconscious, by what signs can we be sure we have reached this real basis of our mental life? The answer appears to be the same in both cases: by the pain that reality causes us. We have, as it were, reached reality only when it hurts. Thus, Dostoyevsky's anti-hero sees the choice before him in life as "cheap happiness or exalted suffering." For one brief interlude he expresses conventional moral ideas to a girl in distress; he warns her of her fate, tells her the truth to save her, even imagines himself as her gallant saviour. Then he remembers how inauthentic happiness is and treats her as vilely as possible. This causes him a pang of remorse, but he stifles it with the (altogether Nietzschean) thought:

> Will it not be better that she should keep the resentment of the insult for ever? Resentment—why, it is purification; it is a most stinging and painful consciousness! Tomorrow I should have defiled her soul and have exhausted her heart, while now the feeling of insult will never die in her heart. . . .

Dostoyevsky doubtless predicts the future behaviour of his intellectual correctly. He could never make this girl happy because he is not concerned with her or her happiness, but with truth. That is to say—because the modern intellectual's ideal of truth has neither moral nor religious connotations, but is a matter of psychological penetration—he is concerned with a particular kind of intellectual satisfaction. Without wishing to identify the underground man with his author, for Dostoyevsky's vision is not restricted to this type of mentality alone, we may nevertheless identify the kind of intellectual satisfaction that his anti-hero seeks with that of writing, of creative thinking. Like Nietzsche after him, Dostoyevsky interprets this satisfaction, at least in the kind of intellectual he depicts here, as a fascination with power, as an effort to affirm through words and thoughts the power-instinct that the intellectual is too weak to satisfy in society. Thus, the underground man humiliates the girl, Liza, by giving her a psychological explanation of why he had once addressed her kindly: "Power, power was what I wanted then, sport was what I wanted, I wanted to wring out your tears, your humiliation, your hysteria—that was what I wanted then! . . . Because I only like playing with words, only dreaming, but, do you know, what I really want is that you should all go to Hell. That is what I want. I want peace." It is a brilliant characterization of what goes on in the mind of an alienated intellectual. He cannot bear the intrusion of a real person into his life; when he eventually makes love to Liza, it is out of feelings neither of love nor of lust, but again of power, of "mastery and possession," because the girl's gentle gestures of love have challenged his sense of superiority. "It was almost like an act of vengeance," and he completes it by offering her money.

The only apparent puzzle in the man's otherwise consistently vile psychology is why he should suddenly say that what he really wants is peace. Is power, and sending everyone else to Hell, the way to peace? Dostoyevsky, of course, sees well enough that it is not, and assumes that his reader will see that it is not. To have found peace, the underground man would have had to accept the reality of a totally different dimension of experience: namely, of love. But this he cannot accept; for him, the real is a hostile, hateful place, governed by the laws of sex and power, pleasure and pain, and to imagine anything else is a sentimental delusion. Dostoyevsky's analysis shows us how this mind that wants peace, that attempts to live in complete isolation and detachment from what it regards as the altogether vulgar and stupid world, is in fact the victim of its own intelligence. The underground man's psychological view of life is itself "deeply" sick, and illustrates a point that the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus (1874–1936) once made against the growing craze for psycho-analysis: "It is," he said, "a disease of which it claims to be the cure."

Dostoyevsky is a writer of rare genius in his ability both to understand so profoundly the destructive psychology of sex and power and to see beyond it to a kind of experience, and a kind of person, that can survive it. (In the religious passages of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which stand in contrast to the power-political theories of Ivan, as well as in the politically unrealistic proposals in *The Diary of a Writer* [1873–4], which conceive of Russia as some sort of religious society, Dostoyevsky seems to be considering what kind of community might survive the destructiveness of Western analytical intelligence.) Undoubtedly he idealizes the simple goodness of souls such as Liza, and Sonia in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and Aliosha Karamazov; and in *The Idiot* (1868–9) he attempted to portray in the barely stable mind of Prince Mishkin an exceptional unity of goodness and intelligence.

The idealization of simple people and simple communities is one of the most important points of psychological inspiration in modern literature; for the simple has a special interest for sophisticated minds. "Simple pleasures are the last refuge of the complex," as Oscar Wilde observed. But again we are forced to see the negative implications of this ideal; its virtue shines most brightly for minds darkened by doubt or deprivation, and any attempt to reach or possess it is fraught with difficulty and danger.

André Gide explored the ambiguity of this relationship in his analysis of Michel, the Sorbonne intellectual who is the hero of *L'immoraliste* (1902); for him Arab boys and Normandy peasants have a vitality that his wife and their circle of bourgeois friends lack, and that he also lacks, of course, despite his efforts to embrace more "healthy" values. He believes these values to be the possession of another social class and tries to possess it with them; the experience turns out to be "a bitter fruit filled with ashes," because he loses the psychological sense of distance that alone could lend depth to sensuality.

By contrast, we may consider the more restrained idealization of the working class in Theodor Fontane's *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1888; Confusions), where the oddly intelligent representative of a not very vital class, Botho von Rienäcker, never loses his sense of his own position; he cannot marry his girl from the *Volk*. (It is revealing that, even at the turn of the century, Fontane's imagination still sees a working-class girl as coming from the country; he creates a country setting for Lisa, in the form of a market garden, in the middle of Berlin.) When a comrade with a similar *amour* considers emigrating to America in order to marry the girl, Botho advises him not to do so: in those altered social conditions the psychological charm of their love will not survive.

The same theme recurs again in most of Italo Svevo's work, although he stresses the psychological distance caused by age rather more than that caused by class, as may be seen in *Senilità* (1898; As a Man Grows Older) and *Il vecchio e la fanciulla* (1899; The Old Man and the Girl). Svevo (1861–1928) makes clear how his "senile" hero of the earlier story deludes himself with "a dream," in order simply to "relieve his wretched state of mind," when he explains to his unscrupulous and unfaithful young mistress that their unhappiness is entirely due to their poverty and that "in another society he could have married her openly, publicly, at once." The real cause of his disastrous infatuation, which destroys his own life and that of his family, is not social but psychological.

> If he had really wanted, really willed it energetically, she would have been his. But instead he had merely concentrated on giving their relationship an ideal quality which had finally made him ridiculous even in his own eyes.

Svevo presents the text of his major novel, *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923; The Confessions of Zeno), as an act of psycho-analysis, a self-analysis written by the hero for his doctor. By the end he has no further confidence in any psychic means of regaining health. With a perspicacity (though not a style) akin to Proust's, Svevo has comprehended that reality and imagination are mutually exclusive. His primary way of demonstrating this is through Zeno's attempts at giving up smoking. Zeno lends a most "ideal quality" to the state of having given up, but can never really achieve it. The reason is obvious enough: if he gave up smoking for very long, he would lose his ideal at the same time: he would no longer notice it. To experience his ideal, he must continually be smoking his "last cigarette." The same psychological paradox haunts his attempts at marriage, at a love affair, and at business life. For a while he cherishes the hope of becoming like his domestically contented wife "who was the personification of health." What was the secret of his wife's contentment? "That for her the present was a tangible truth in which it was possible to hide and feel warm." But Zeno's analytical grasp of this truth prevents him from possessing such health, for as he realizes, "by analysing it, I am changing it into a kind of sickness."

The style of Svevo's analysis is curiously un-Italian, doubtless as a result of his mixed German-Italian-Jewish parentage and of the historical circumstances that had kept Trieste within the Germanic sphere of culture. Perhaps Musil was right when he suggested that the citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were more troubled than any others in Europe by uncertainty as to their nationality. Certainly, Austrian intellectuals were peculiarly susceptible to psychological ideas and acutely aware of the problem of alienation. Psychologically, Svevo's ideas have a point of contact with those of his younger contemporary and fellow-sufferer in an uncongenial business office, Franz Kafka (1883–1924), who also was Jewish and lived in a racially divided Austrian city, Prague. Kafka's dominant experience, recorded in his most important diaries and correspondence, was of exclusion from any simple enjoyment of life, symbolized for him above all by love grounded in marriage and family and social position. None of this could he attain; instead, he turned to introspective writing, of which he remarked: "My talent for portraying my dream-like inner life has thrust all other matters into the background." What he showed was a vision of experience entirely dominated by mysterious forces of sex and power, guilt and aggression. The psychological interest of these neurotic phantasies, which in themselves appear all but incomprehensible, is sustained by the determination and intelligence of Kafka's fictitious hero, K, who lives in hopes of getting his "case" settled, of reaching innocence and happiness and a place in society. He cannot succeed, of course, because he is dealing not with a social reality, as he imagines, but with a psychological one. This hellish vision of unattainable happiness "was made for him alone," as the hero of *Der Prozess* (1914–5; The Trial) discovers in a parable. And critics of Kafka's work as a whole are coming now at last to the view that his protagonists in some way seem to be bringing this psychological fate upon themselves. Their hell is made also by themselves alone. Or rather, they and their fate symbolize in outward show Kafka's inmost, personal experience as a writer: that the mind cannot cure itself with knowledge, but stands always in its own way, capable only of knowing—once it has embarked on this fatal experience of psychological introspection—the futility of its own efforts at understanding. The introspective mind is incapable of knowing what the quality of the good life may be except negatively; Kafka's basic obsession is with the elimination of his own guilty intelligence.

VI

Few writers have pursued the search for psychological knowledge so intensely into their own minds or left so horrifying an image of what society looks like to a sick mind. (That Kafka is widely regarded as having shown what totalitarian society is "like" is surely misleading; he shows us nothing of the social forces or factors that bring such tyranny about—unless it be a psychological predisposition in modern intellectuals to succumb to it, recognizing it less for what it is politically than as an image of their own neurotic condition.) We should consider therefore the efforts also of those writers who have attempted to derive a more positive lesson from their psychological insights. One such is D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), whose psychology was decisively influenced by his relationship with his family as well as by his preoccupation with the needs of the creative imagination. Observing the conflict between his parents, he realized how the middle-class mentality of his mother had been attracted toward the simple sensual vitality of his working-class father; he also realized how his mother came to resist and destroy his father by her superior intelligence, transferring her love to her son, in whom their conflict was deeply associated with the burgeoning of his own artistic sensitivity. Lawrence first explored the significance of these relationships in a novel of fairly conventional form, *Sons and Lovers* (1913); he then returned to various elements in these first, formative experiences, which directed the focus of much of his later attention to the world about him. In particular, he returned to the theme of sexual attraction between people of different classes, as for instance in the short story that epitomizes so much of his work, "The Daughters of the Vicar." Here the emphasis falls entirely on the liberation of the mind from middle-class prejudice, which in different ways has affected both the boy and the girl in the story, and there is little consideration of the likely psychological consequences of their marriage. Nor is there in Lawrence's last, notorious work, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1926–7), where it is the physical union of the lady and the working man that is dwelt upon, rather than their differences of character and outlook.* Lawrence's sexual psychology made him always highly critical of the class structure of English society as it was in the early 1920s; and the greatest hurt it inflicted was, he believed, inward, inhibiting the mind and heart and sexual capacity of individuals. But by the same token Lawrence discovered at the sexual core of the individual, in the wounded part itself, the possibility of a new health and strength. So important was the discovery of this unconscious power to Lawrence that it more than made up for, it positively transformed, the difficulties and differences that society imposed on his lovers.

It seems likely that, for reasons deeply rooted in his personal make-up, the sexual encounter between persons who are social and moral strangers remained associated in Lawrence's mind with the excitement of artistic inspiration. These moments of intense vision that he describes, when the mind is seized, engulfed, consumed by organic power, *may* represent sexual experience—but surely only as it is understood by an unusually gifted person. In Lawrence's fiction it is not always clear who this person is; that is to say, from what point of view he is writing and seeing experience. He behaves as a novelist in the opposite way from Flaubert, who kept the simple-mindedness of his characters at arm's length from his own sophisticated intelligence; Lawrence blends his characters' deepest emotional experiences with his own mystical lyricism. Or again, we may compare him with Proust and note a similar contrast. No less than Proust, Lawrence judges the meaning of sexual possession in terms of imaginative awareness. Because Proust was writing of his *own* experience of love, he concluded that possession was impossible, because reality leaves no room for imagination. Lawrence, interestingly, writes of the one aspect of sexual possession that could only be an imaginative act for him as a male writer: the deepest physical sensations in a woman. The paradox of his position becomes apparent precisely because he insists so much on the "sensational" nature of sexual experience, fulminating against what he called "sex in the brain." But what else has he produced, in his writing, than an idea (in the brain) of what sexual experience may be "like"? That it may be like inspiration, that erotic desire may be the first impulse toward beauty, that eros is ultimately even a longing in the soul for truth—this Plato already knew; though he did not, of course, suppose that sexual pleasure was the consummation of that desire, the fulfilment of that longing. Nor did Lawrence believe any such thing, because he devoted himself to writing rather than to sex. But he introduced a confusing element into his fiction by ignoring the psychological distance that separates inspired understanding from physical sensation.

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* This is less true of the earlier and in many ways more interesting versions of the novel.

A similar confusion is exploited, more or less deliberately, by the mass of cheap literature that offers the modern public *phantasy* experiences of sex and violence. The untruth of such writing and its potential harm is psychological. Perhaps the point may be exemplified most clearly by a reference to the plastic arts. The beauty of the nude by Giorgione is symbolic; the artistic distance from which it has been realized is so apparent that any phantasies of sexual possession aroused in the spectator would be a mark of only very rudimentary comprehension. The beauty of so-called "art" photographs in sex magazines is effective in direct proportion to their power to evoke phantasies of possession, a sense of participating physically in what is represented. In literature, too, the effectiveness of much naturalistic writing depends on evoking this sense of participating in the physical reality, beside which the old symbolic conceptions of experience are regarded as unreal, simply because they are ideas. Even so serious a writer as Albert Camus (1913–60) indulges in this phantasy technique, for instance, in his celebrated novel *L'étranger* (1942; The Outsider). There he represents the low-level mental and physical sensations in the life of a young man, who is too insensitive and stupid to feel any love for anyone, indeed to feel anything at all, even after killing another human being—except that society bothers him; and Camus contrasts this "reality"—which is a highly literary construct, as artificial as studio photographs of nudes—with the inappropriate moral ideas that society cherishes about the ideal nature of experience. Of course, Camus's novel is not crudely violent or pornographic in the sensation of reality it tries to evoke; indeed it is at moments lyrical, and even the more banal aspects of events are selected and arranged with artistic skill. This, however, only makes the pretence at denying any ideal perspective, the pretence that here we have reality and not art, all the more confusing. Nor can this confusion be separated from the idealistic tendency of Camus's writing, because he, like Lawrence, believed there was a kind of salvation available to a corrupt society, if only men would free themselves from false ideas and embrace the real. What both these writers actually had "in mind" was an imaginative embrace, a fresh *vision* of the real in their own artistic imagination.

VII

A more subtle play with the perspective that separates artistic contemplation from reality can be discovered in the later work of Henry James (1843–1916). Far from underestimating the distance between the way things appear in the mind and the way they really are, he extended it to a point where a reader may have difficulty in connecting what is going on with the abstruse reflections in the minds of the characters. James knew well enough how much crude power and villainy were masked by the polite façade of social intercourse; but instead of tearing it down to expose sexual and predatory realities underneath, he understood that the mind must always choose to represent reality in terms of an idea, and that this idea might be a beautiful act. In the earlier novels of Henry James the façade is challenged and the plots are allowed to take their melodramatic course toward disaster. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), on the other hand, the really tragic moment never materializes. The tragedy is in fact anticipated, accepted, and spiritually transformed by the heroine in each case. Both these young American women begin with an image of European society that proves false. Yet when the evil lurking behind the culturally elegant façade of Europe breaks through, Millie and Maggie both manage to contain it within a vision, and a style of behaviour, which not only saves appearances but gives them a new psychological life. These young women positively preserve the image of civilization itself by a gesture of the spirit.*

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* Both gestures are at the expense of life, and many readers do not find Maggie's gesture admirable at all. James, however, was clearly more interested in the triumph of form over fact than in its collapse (which he feared) and defeat by the real.

The psychology of this gesture is modelled closely on the activity of the artistic imagination. The moment in *The Golden Bowl* when Maggie realizes that she must recreate the image of her world if tragedy is not to break loose in it is inspired by a sense not so much of moral command as of artistic possibilities. As she looks at the members of her family, who are involved with her in a potentially disastrous situation, she feels her relationship to them to be that of a writer to his characters. Maggie feels deeply wronged, and her detachment from the scene before her in no sense signifies emotional coldness. But she cannot play the conventional part, she cannot simply act out her tragedy.

> She might fairly . . . have yearned for the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion, as for something she had been cheated of not least: a range of feelings which for many women would have meant so much, but which for *her* husband's wife, for *her* father's daughter, figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles.

We have here a beautiful example of the way in which an action, natural enough in itself and surely satisfying a primitive instinct of revenge (for the image that comes to her mind is one of savagery), proves impossible precisely because it suggests a picture of things that, the heroine feels, is simply not "her." What she has to be is "*her* husband's wife, *her* father's daughter," that is to say, not simply her natural self, but an ideal person created out of her consciousness of her place in the drama before her, whose concluding scene "she might people either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins."

An unsympathetic reader of James might say that the evil has been only glossed over, and that the gloss is effective only because the heroines are so rich. Certainly, James is always aware of the influence of money on a person's ideas. Where his contemporaries would sometimes see the material miseries wrought by disparities of wealth, James sees primarily the psychological power of money, the power of unearned riches to buy and blackmail the spirit. By the same token he has no interest in political programmes for merely redistributing material goods; he is interested rather in the psychological redemption of this money-power, which he knows to be capable also of bringing beauty and even blessing into people's lives. The redemption is certainly precarious, and is doubtless partly an illusion produced by the way James manipulates the novel. Not only does his style come nearer and nearer to dissolving the real substance of a situation, distilling it away, as it were, into pure spiritual considerations, but in addition James so structures his chapters that we are kept in ignorance of what many of the characters really feel.

It is interesting to recall that James admired the French realist writers, many of whom he knew personally and whose style influenced his own. What he appreciated was the fine art with which Maupassant, and before him particularly Flaubert, rendered the quality of spiritual illusion in the lives of their characters. James, however, derived a different psychological lesson from this type of artistic representation. Instead of using it exclusively to the disadvantage of his characters, to break their illusions against the hard ground of fact, he saw the possibility of allowing them to be successful in their dream of a better and more beautiful life. The *illusions perdues* with which French 19th-century literature is strewn had, after all, been destroyed by means of a particular type of imaginative—and *imaginary*, let it be remembered—observation. This "realistic" psychology had also been modelled on what writers naturally understood as being the central process of the mind: its creative longings, and disillusions. But whereas most 19th-century writers applied this psychology negatively to the world about them, James arrived at a positive application of it.

What he chiefly exploits in the process is the element of illusion, of artifice, that is present in all art. Every picture is painted from a selected point of view, which keeps out of sight far more than it depicts. In James, as in many modern writers, the aesthetic manipulation of the subject strikes us as an essential part of its meaning. He is confronting us with that psychological truth that Proust made the cornerstone of his great book and which he never tired of affirming: the meaning of an experience or event or thing does not reside in the thing itself but in us, in our relationship to it. Whether it would be possible actually to live by the light of this artist's psychology seems more doubtful, and there remains a slight feeling about the conclusions of James's last novels that they have been rigged.

It is possible that this shadow of artificiality would have been less noticeable had James succeeded in writing effectively in the literary form that particularly attracted him, the drama. The conditions of theatrical performance have lent themselves surprisingly well to the modern desire to experiment psychologically with reality. We may observe in conclusion how a growing preoccupation with the inner world of the mind developed in the work of the Sicilian-born writer Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936), and found its fullest expression in his later dramas. In an early novel, *L'esclusa*

(1893; The Outcast), we see him concerned already with the power that fixed ideas have in determining people's view of themselves and others: in this case, the ideas are the traditional Sicilian ones regarding a woman's place in society, and her conduct in love. The heroine has to fight a lonely battle against prejudice and injustice, and she turns to education and a job as a teacher, symbols in Pirandello's mind of a new independence and enlightenment, even if they cannot of themselves relieve the woman's sufferings entirely. Then, in the middle years of his career, Pirandello produced much of his finest work in the form of short stories, a form that, as we have seen, reached a remarkable level of perfection and popularity throughout Europe during the late 19th and early 20th century because it suited well the new interest in the psychological *aperçu* in depth as opposed to the narrative development required by a novel. Whereas in *L'esclusa* Pirandello developed the problem of mental limitation as a social issue that clearly could and should be reformed, in the short stories the glimpses he shows us of warped mentalities are more ambiguous. To begin with, many are much more humorous—quaint habits of mind are peculiar to individuals rather than to sections of society; others are pathetic—private images or obsessions that console some personal grief and that no one surely would criticize or wish to correct. Consider, for instance, the story "Tu ridi" (You Laugh), written in 1913. An unhelpful, unsympathetic, hypochondriac wife is exasperated because every night her husband laughs in his sleep. There is precious little laughter in the poor man's waking life, as Pirandello movingly describes it, and we take the obvious psychological point that Giorgio finds compensation in his dreams for the joylessness of his days. Pirandello does not leave the matter there, however. He makes Giorgio recall one day what the previous night's dream had been about: it is not at all benign, but rather obscene and aggressive. If *this* is what makes him laugh, Pirandello and his hero conclude, there is not much sense in it. The ending is philosophically detached, neither expecting that such dark phantasies should be stopped, nor yet placing much faith in their meaningfulness (not even, we may note, as clues to a psychiatric analysis).

When we come at last to the plays that made Pirandello famous, such as *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921; Six Characters in Search of an Author), more dramatic importance is allowed to the phantasies of the inner life. The sense of being the creator of one's own world, of being free to people one's own drama, in James's words, "either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins," is taken to a point where phantasy can no longer be distinguished from reality. Or perhaps we should say: they cannot be distinguished in a good performance on stage, for who shall then say what is illusion and what reality? Pirandello's power to convince us that his characters can really live in the illusory worlds that they have created for themselves, or that others have created for them, depends upon the mood and "presence" that gifted actors and producers can achieve in a theatre. They have, through the magic of their make-believe medium, the chance to make us feel the power that passion exerts below the level of commonplace appearances, to the point where these appearances themselves are no more than symbols of a state of mind. They bring home to us, for instance, in *Così è* (*se vi pare*) (1917; Right You Are [If You Think So]), that, psychologically speaking, it is only superficial and insensitive people who insist that a person's identity, the question as to who a person really is, is simply a matter of fact—just as it is a mark of the hero's moral superiority in *Tutto per bene* (1920; All's Well) that he can maintain his belief in his wife and daughter, even though in fact they are not his. Pirandello's greatest *tour de force* in this respect is *Enrico Quarto* (1922; Henry the Fourth), where for a moment he reverses the commonsense evaluation even of madness and sanity. The man who knowingly lives his days in the fiction that he is a mediaeval king has glimpses of the element of mere masquerade in life itself, which some men live in all seriousness, without realizing that it is a play, blind in their commonsense realism to all the passion of drama. Thus the self-styled Henry the Fourth declares:

> This dress [*plucking at his robe*], which for me is the caricature. . . , manifest and voluntary, of that other masquerade, that ceaseless and everlasting masquerade in which we are the involuntary players, the fools and clowns, when without realizing it we put on the mask that we think looks like ourselves. . . . But I am cured, ladies and gentlemen, because I know perfectly well that I'm playing the madman here. And I do so very quietly. You are the ones to be pitied, for you live out your madness in a state of constant agitation, without seeing it, without knowing it.

Pirandello's image of life as a play would, of course, have been familiar enough to Shakespeare, whose theatre abounds in metaphors of acting, scenes of dressing-up and disguise, plots of pretence and unmasking. But with Shakespeare they are just that—metaphors, scenes, plots: they may illumine or imitate the world, but the world itself is not supposed to be "really" a theatre in which it would be possible consciously and deliberately to act instead of (or at the same time as) to live—which is what Enrico appears to be doing. There must obviously be a difference between the real and the simulated if concepts such as art, imitation, acting, and so forth are to make sense; Enrico is both distinguishing between them and not distinguishing between them in the same breath.

Enrico's ambiguous attitude provides a convenient point at which to conclude and summarize this survey of the role played by psychology in modern literature. It is not a moral psychology, and its treatment of what used to be called the passions is rarely remarkable. Modern literature has proved to be psychologically most profound and original when dealing with the workings of phantasy, image-making, and symbolization: that is, with the needs, satisfactions, and frustrations of the creative impulse. The literary imagination has drawn on its own understanding of itself and interpreted large areas of the world, including much ordinary, non-literary experience, by its light. The result has been an often formidable "psycho-critique" of modern life that is radical in its condemnations but unfortunately also somewhat ambiguous. Because it understands how all the variously private and public fictions that enclose the world are made, the literary mind can enjoy imaginatively a position of superior freedom over and above all of them. This freedom is both deeply inspiring and profoundly nihilistic. How fragile must appear the illusions with which men have adorned their lives; how flimsy is the façade of civilization! Yet how invigorating to encounter the world afresh! Do the freedom, then, the freshness, and the new encounter really promise a way of life different from anything known before—or merely another book, a make-believe, an illusion, a somewhat implausible charade such as Enrico's? Here modern literature has stood at the boundaries of its own domain, clamouring—sometimes violently*—to pass over into life; *blurring* the boundaries, in fact, between art and life in order to reveal creativity at the heart of living. And may it not, after all, be present there? It may, but the paradox entailed in knowing it remains: the fictive creations of the mind can be recognized as such only when they are felt to be false. Hence the very psychological idealism of modern literature has left behind it a trail of destruction.

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* See Ch. 3, "Violence in Twentieth-Century Literature."

CHAPTER 2

Eros and Idiom

George Steiner*

I

In Chapter XI of Book III of *Emma* (1816) the heroine is shocked into a realization of her own condition of feeling:

> Harriet was standing at one of the windows. Emma turned round to look at her in consternation, and hastily said,
>
> "Have you any idea of Mr Knightley's returning your affection?"
>
> "Yes," replied Harriet modestly, but not fearfully—"I must say that I have."
>
> Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched—she admitted—she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself!

The economy of the passage is all. This economy is the immediate product of a large confidence, of a community of response between Jane Austen and her material and the novelist and her readers. Such community expresses itself in a prose which is, structurally, a shorthand. The words used by the novelist draw on public energies, on areas of meaning and implication which may be wide but whose reach of admissible reference is determined. The idiomatic carries a general charge of required significance. Metaphors are relatively infrequent or when they appear they do so in a condition of eroded vitality. Another way of saying that a language can move richly while "on the surface" is to say that *Emma* was written in a time, in a moment of culture, in which style and convention were close.

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* Extraordinary Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge.

A closeness of this kind usually has behind it a strong literary manner now attenuated and become a part of current speech. Below the concise ease of Emma's self-recognition runs the current, once sharply stylized, of Restoration comedy. It is the established specificity of the terminology of manner and feeling in Restoration comedy and the sentimental novel of the late 18th century that enables Jane Austen to proceed with speed and confident exactitude. There is no need of shading or of the vital indeterminacies of the modern tone. *Heart* and *mind* have their own determined valuations in a vocabulary of consciousness no doubt complex and particular in its historical roots but, so far as the novelist is concerned, now available for direct, unencumbered use. The "evil so dreadfully increased" carries considerable intensity, but it is subverted, to the precise measure of irony required, by the fact that it belongs to an idiom conventionally, fictionally heightened into imperfect gravity. There is no mistaking the gestures, hence no need of elaboration or localized stress: the turn in consternation, the eyes instantly withdrawn, Emma's fixity, are parts of a code of significant manners as declaratory in their simplicity, in their lack of visual rhetoric, as is her diction. And it is precisely the triumph of a mastered conventionality to make its own individual, richly felt point in the most public of ways: that arrow of love darting through Emma. Nothing could be more deliberately worn, more void of its initial, long-forgotten metaphoric vivacity. The shaft of love piercing the unwilling or unknowing maiden's heart had, long before Emma, lost even the salience of a *cliché*. Yet Jane Austen can afford this dead turn and can make it active. The banality of the image qualifies—a qualification urged throughout the novel—the genuine authority and hurt of Emma Woodhouse's feelings. Her vulnerabilities are real but bounded, which defining limitation is beautifully enforced by the very turn of the phrase: "Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself!" The imperious note, Emma's placing of herself at the centre, the mere setting of the last word, restore to self-confidence, and restore to our own sense of a necessary if gentle irony, the figure of the young woman woken to love. Where conventions of expressive form are so stable and so explicitly associative of writer to reader, syntax comes fully into its own.

The active life of conventionality is notable, principally, in Jane Austen's handling of the implicit sexual material. So direct yet unobtrusively public is the available idiom that we almost overlook the raw facts of the situation: two women in love and necessarily rival. Both the allusion to Frank Churchill and the predatory, if comic, pulse of the last sentence sharpen the edge of feeling. It is men and women who are in play and the gamut of possibilities between them from seduction to marriage. Emma is transformed body and soul, within the limitations of crisis allowed by Jane Austen. A few moments later Miss Woodhouse is at the edge of her own sense of being: "ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her—her affection for Mr Knightley.—Every other part of her mind was disgusting." Yet the sexual turbulence, the implications of action that flow from the muted encounter of Emma and Harriet, cannot, need not be articulated. They are inside the narrative, not in the sense of impulse hidden or unconscious, but as an area of understood meaning so intelligently faced, so publicly acquiesced in—the novelist and her reader having, as it were, negotiated a treaty of mutual intent—that there is no need of localizing articulation. Such a pact, in reference to sexuality, is the underlying condition of Jane Austen's art. Without it she could not proceed as swiftly and with as confidently limited a completeness as she does. The "negotiation" of that *entente* is a long story. It involves the middle-class rejection of the open eroticism—open in the sense of being pictorial, punning, metaphorically unstable—of Restoration comedy, while at the same time absorbing much of that eroticism into sentimental fiction. In Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) eroticism shifts from solicitation to spectacle; a distance of condescension and socially informed sentiment, adroitly varied by the novelist, intervenes between the world of the fiction and that of the reader. Jane Austen is heir to that "distancing," although in her what had been in *Clarissa* (1748) a zone of prurience is now firm, neutral ground. But the most relevant fact is that Jane Austen's conventionality, free and intelligent as it strikes us, was already a rearguard action, an attempt to transmit to a new, splintered society standards, manners of judgment founded in the culture of the age of Johnson and Cowper. By the time of *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* the erotic imagination had broken free on at least two principal lines: in the trashy but often cunningly stylized and "psychologically underpinned" sexuality of the Gothic novel, and in the lyric concreteness of Romantic poetry. Sixteen years before *Emma*, in the 1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth had firmly related "the sexual appetite" to "the great spring of the activity of our minds." And one need but glance at the "Lucy" poems to realize how far Wordsworth's terminology had advanced toward a complex, disturbingly penetrative use of sexual symbolism. In their treatment of the relations of feeling and desire between men and women, the novels of Jane Austen represent a rearguard action. They succeed through sheer force of serenity (a serenity obviously related to their total refusal of contemporaneous politics and history). But such leisured progress on a tightrope could not be performed again. In Jane Austen sex is, essentially, gender. The terms were soon to be reversed.

But neither as rapidly nor as generally as might have been expected. Jane Austen's contract had looked to the past. It was based on minority values and a theory of formal expression. The erotic reticence or erosive conventionality of the English novelists of the mid-century had broader motives. The novel had become the principal currency of middle-class feeling with its expectations of entertainment, of unobtrusive instruction, and, above all, of emotional and intellectual "familiarity." Both connotations, intimacy and familial tone, are important. The Victorian novel-reader wished to be at home in the world of his reading and demanded that those in his sitting-room be a party to his pleasures. Publishers, home-libraries, periodicals, an entire industry of allowed sensibility, flourished in response to well-established canons of imaginative temperance and domesticity. Economically this helped bring on a formidable expansion of serious if "middle-brow" literacy. Artistically it necessitated a series of concessions or evasive tactics on the part of the novelists. In no one did necessary concession and bias of temper unite more coherently than in Dickens. His genius and the representative stature he achieved were in large part the result of a vital accord between the taste of the public and Dickens's profound sympathy with that taste.

The complicated energies released in Dickens's work pose many problems. None is more arresting than the fact that no other writer of comparable stature, of even related imaginative multiplicity in any modern literature, has ever been so innocent of stated adult sexuality. To say that this innocence has made of Dickens a classic for children or, more accurately, a classic whom adults re-read in a special ambience of remembered trust (we cannot so re-read *Gulliver's Travels*), is merely to point to an obvious consequence. Dickens's refusal of adult sexuality left clear marks. The symbolic vehemence and scarcely mastered crudity of melodrama in *Bleak House* (1853) and *Great Expectations* (1861) suggest a subterranean pressure of erotic recognition. The curious flashes of cruelty and hysteria notable as early as the "black tales" in *Pickwick Papers* (1837) persist; they give to *Little Dorrit* (1857) much of its disturbing strength. But more often and, so far as Dickens's enormous readership was concerned, more characteristically, the absence of the erotic produced varieties of sentimentality. Dickens created a garden for fallen man, a nursery world from which middle-class optimism and bustle have, temporarily at least, banished the serpent. The Dora-David-Agnes relationship in *David*

Copperfield (1850) is as deliberate a pastoral as any to be found in the Renaissance trope of the garden of love. It relegates the values of adult sexuality to the "innocent" eroticism of the child (innocent before Freud). Dickens touches with sure instinct on a chord vibrant even in severe Protestantism: the resistance of the imagination to the thought that children too have been mined by original sin. In *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) Henry James was to create a parody, deliberately sexual in focus, of Dickens's "juvenal-pastoral."

Dickens's achievement is formidable, but not all could so readily pay the price. Thackeray's relations with his middle-class audience and the latter's criteria of sexual tameness were unstable and, at moments, waspish. His recourse, both emotional and strategic, to the 18th century points directly toward a lost candour and robustness in the erotic. Hence the famous complaint in the Preface to *Pendennis* (1850) that the novelist must drape masculinity and give "a certain conventional simper" to his depiction of man, that no one since Fielding had been allowed to show man whole. Thackeray's malaise is evident in the flawed genius of *Vanity Fair* (1848). Becky Sharp's career, set down by the novelist in precise contemporaneity with Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, illustrates what is probably the foremost insight of the modern novel: the interweaving, the symbolic and structural interchanges between economic and sexual relations. It develops Balzac's recognition that class, sex, and money are expressions of more essential, underlying power-relations. But, as often in Thackeray, the lack of available frankness induces a satirical, mock-ceremonious tone: compelled to observe "family manners" which are at odds with the abrasive candour of his perceptions, Thackeray writes tangentially; being less than "MAN" his personages accept all too easily the designation of puppets.

The case most difficult to account for in terms of middle-class taste and professional response is, of course, that of the Brontës. The depth of sexual commitment in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is disguised or rather stylized by a brilliant recourse to already obsolete Gothic counters. *Jane Eyre* (1847) aroused hostility by its assumption of sexual readiness—poised, asking for mature arousal—in a "decent" woman. But here also an intense stylization occurs. We may observe, in the encounters of the heroine and Rochester, how sexuality is made elemental, how a vocabulary of feverish grandeur effaces specific eroticism. In Charlotte Brontë, as in Lucretius, there is the vision of a world totally, therefore in the last analysis innocently, guiltlessly, informed by desire. Precisely because it is a lesser work, *Villette* (1853) proved more indicative of future solutions.

The pressure of erotic recollection is intense; but the narrative moves on a level of symbolic realism, of natural incidents symbolically ordered, which was to give prose fiction its full authority. From *Villette* it was but a step to the more confident art of George Eliot.

There are several reasons why *Middlemarch* (1872) is pre-eminent among English novels, why it exhibits a cumulative genius of persuasion which, almost inevitably, directs one to Tolstoy. One of the main causes is the quality and extent of George Eliot's information, the sheer pressure of knowledge, exact and imaginatively mastered, she brings to bear on every aspect of her material. It is this particular authority of the thoroughly *known* which gives to the novel—"vast, swarming, deep-coloured, crowded with episodes," as Henry James[1] termed it—a firm pivot. We do not find before *Middlemarch* (and we scarcely find again in the subsequent history of the English novel) the erudition, the responsible learning dramatically imagined and conveyed, which make possible the treatment of Lydgate's medical work and ambitions in Chapter XV of Book II. The description of Reform Bill agitation and of the role of the new journalism in it—a role ironically yet understandingly located in the novelist's handling of Will Ladislaw—again draws its conviction from a body of knowledge personally gathered, wholly ordered, and in reach of feeling. This same authority informs George Eliot's presentation of the two principal sexual motifs in the book, the Dorothea-Casaubon fiasco and Lydgate's relationship to Rosamond.

The narrative of the Casaubon honeymoon, with its possible reference to the life of Mark Pattison, is so closely meshed that it is difficult to locate in any single passage the full tact and perception of the novelist. The city of Rome is made the direct symbolic counterpart to Dorothea's bewilderment. "The past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar. But this stupendous fragmentariness heightened the dream-like strangeness of her bridal life." The very season informs against the obscurely woken young woman: "autumn and winter seemed to go hand in hand like a happy aged couple one of whom would presently survive in chiller loneliness." Working in this chapter (XX, Book II) at the tense limits of available concreteness, George Eliot does resort to uneasy paraphrase: "Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense"; "many souls in their young nudity are tumbled out among incongruities." The uncharacteristic baroque touch is deeply informative: the "young nudity" is not primarily that of the soul, a point clarified, if any such clarification is required, by a constant reference to the statues and paintings seen by Dorothea. The "incongruities" (and "tumbled" is a beautifully betraying verb) are those of a brutal marital fiasco. But such is the density and strong pulse of the narrative that the local need for paraphrase, with its attendant risk of modish allegory, does not dim the precise, radical truth:

> Now, since they had been in Rome, with all the depths of her emotion roused to tumultuous activity, and with life made a new problem by new elements, she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness.

The vocabulary remains "chaste" in the precise Augustan sense of the word, the chastity being largely a matter of abstraction, of a generalized syntax. But the cumulative intensity of George Eliot's manner, her power to suggest a known particularity, make the full meaning of what she is saying unmistakable. When the physical touch does come, the effect is the more poignant: "she had ardour enough for what was near, to have kissed Mr Casaubon's coat-sleeve, or to have caressed his shoe-latchet." The master-stroke, moreover, comes later, when the honeymoon is a sombre recollection. At the close of Chapter XXIX of Book III, Dorothea and Celia are talking of the latter's engagement to Sir James Chettam. Will Dodo be glad to see Sir James and hear him tell of his cottages?

> "Of course I shall. How can you ask me?"
>
> "Only I was afraid you would be getting so learned," said Celia, regarding Mr Casaubon's learning as a kind of damp which might in due time saturate a neighbouring body.

The image comes through with repellent force. It tells of sexual failure and revulsion. The contrasting note of sentimental fecundity in Celia and the cottages is delicately struck. The rich exactitude of physical implication is achieved through an exercise of narrative truth so complete, so spaciously laid out, that we do not resent or experience as dated the abstraction, the extreme reticence of George Eliot's idiom.

This idiom is, appropriately, somewhat different in the Lydgate-Rosamond strands of the novel. "There is nothing more powerfully real than these scenes in all English fiction," wrote Henry James,[2] "and nothing certainly more *intelligent*." That reality does not stem from naive verisimilitude. It is, at decisive moments, achieved by means essentially emblematic. As has been repeatedly noticed, Lydgate's courtship of Rosamond and the subsequent crises of their marriage are punctuated by a set of key images. An entire range of dramatic tones is expressed through Rosamond's "fair long neck" and the submissions or angry turns it performs. A larger nakedness is set out in that "exquisite nape which was shown in all its delicate curves" (Chapter LVIII, Book VI). The covert echoes of Eve and of the serpent with "sleek enameled neck" enforce the gravity of Lydgate's fall. With a degree of control almost Shakespearean, in that it "misses nothing," the novelist again focusses our attention on Rosamond's neck during the climactic meeting between Rosamond and Dorothea. But here the erotic values are suppressed and the statement is one of agonized candour; what we are directed to now is "Rosamond's convulsed throat" (the careful imitation of Milton at the end of the chapter clinches the latent identification of Rosamond). Nor ought we to miss the confident, almost theatrical placing of symbolic props in the narrative of Lydgate's proposal (Chapter XXXI, Book III). Lydgate "moved his whip and could say nothing." Rosamond "dropped her chain as if startled, and rose too, mechanically" ("as if" and "mechanically" alert us to an inevitable artifice). "When he rose he was very near to a lovely little face set on a fair long neck." We cannot evade the serpentine note. Lydgate "did not know where the chain went"; but in half an hour he leaves the house fettered, a man "whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself."

In what measure is George Eliot conscious of the associations she so exactly invokes, of the symbolic contents, to us so graphically Freudian, of that moving whip and broken chain? She does not need to be conscious of them in our sense of deliberate, "publicly coded" significance. Her intellectual and psychological awareness is as complete as that of any 20th-century novelist, as directly germane to the intended effect, but it has a different "knowingness." This difference is the key point.

George Eliot's perceptions of sexual feeling, the closeness of observation she brings to bear on erotic sensibility and conflict, yield nothing to that of the moderns. In most instances what passes for characteristic post-Freudian insight is, by comparison, shallow. But these perceptions and the free play of imaginative recognition are immensely in advance of, immensely more explicit than, the vocabulary available to a serious novelist of the 1870s. George Eliot knows more, far more, than she says or feels called upon to say; but that knowledge, precise, informed by a marvellous grasp of human particularity, gives to what is said an unmistakable authority, an energy of undeclared content felt, registered, though as it were unheard. Between the urgent wealth of felt life and the actual idiom of the novel there is a zone of silence, an area of conventional selection in which the novelist's responses—material, psychologically informed, canny as are any of the moderns—are translated into the temperance and conventional indirection of Victorian public speech. But it is just this distance, this close presence of the known but unstated, that gives to the novel its intensity, its matchless energy of adult life. At every point in the treatment of Dorothea's unsentimental education or of Lydgate's submission to Rosamond, George Eliot's verbal reticence stands not for thinness, for absence of radical intelligence, but on the contrary for a nearness of unwasted resource. This reticence, moreover, and deliberate tact allow effects of sensibility almost lost to modern fiction. The novelist treats both her characters and her readers as complex beings; she would not search out the last privacy of self. Hence her largesse of imaginative acceptance. At the close of Book IV, the darkness of the Casaubon marriage deepens into explicit night. Dorothea watches her ailing husband coming upstairs, a light in hand:

> "Dorothea!" he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone, "Were you waiting for me?"
>
> "Yes. I did not like to disturb you."
>
> "Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not to extend your life by watching."
>
> When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together.

The focus is steady and unswervingly honest: the image of the "lamed creature" carries all the relevant charge of frustration, of a relationship irreparably crippled (how much we *lose* by our knowingness about the symbolic, almost lexical equivalent between lameness and castration). But the wonder of the thing lies in its generosity, in the realization unfolded in Dorothea and the reader of Casaubon's human complication, of the claims which that complication can make on our response. This brief nocturne, once again rounded with a Miltonic echo, sets the art of George Eliot beside that of Tolstoy. The authority of compassion is as controlling, as humanizing here as it is in Tolstoy's treatment of Alexei Karenin. But note how closely it depends on the reticence of the medium. It would be impossible for George Eliot to evoke this delicacy of response, this completeness of sympathy, had the ugliness, the rot of body and nerve in Dorothea's honeymoon and married life, been made verbally explicit.

Chasteness of discourse acts not as a limitation but as a liberating privacy within which the characters can achieve the paradox of autonomous life.

The lag of permissible terminology behind perception, and the narrative poise it made necessary and possible, did not last. The formal conventions and social expectations involved were too manifold to be stable. Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) is at significant points a *reprise* of *Middlemarch.* But the intervening years, short as they were, and even more so James's own view[3] of *Middlemarch* as setting a limit "to the development of the old-fashioned English novel," have brought a difference. The treatment of the corroding marriage of Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond is indebted to the Dorothea-Casaubon theme; Florence and the chill discretion of fine art close on Isabel as Rome closed on Dorothea. The "vivid flash of lightning" which at last brings Dorothea and Ladislaw together strikes again as Casper Goodwood embraces Mrs Osmond. But the inwardness which James aims for, the explicit sophistication of psychological analysis, are such that a generalized, unworried vulgate is no longer adequate. The knowledge possessed by the novelist no longer underlines the narrative; it presses on it and insinuates into the writer's style a new consciousness of symbolism. In Henry James chasteness and reserve are deliberate means; we are meant to observe the strenuous tactics of exclusion. What is left out lies in ambush around the next corner. In the Jamesian novel or in such specific uses of "mask" as James's ghostly tales, reticence about sexual matters is not a statement of felt life, but a subtle privation. Often the unsaid comes through with a kind of poetic rush. Nothing could surpass the vividness of implied statement about Olive Chancellor's feelings toward Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians* (1886), a vividness conveyed by the summarizing touch "and the vague snow looked cruel." No more need be said of the relevant sterility and unrealized Lesbian impulse. But too often in James's abundant dramatizations of sexuality the excluded concreteness, the immediacies omitted, lead a subterranean life and proliferate in habits of allegory both too oblique and too obtrusive. What presses on James is an alternative convention, the possibility of graphic statement. George Eliot writes as if *Madame Bovary* (1857) had not posed the challenge, had not articulated the poetics of a new relationship between language and the sexual imagination. Henry James cannot afford such indifference. The potentiality of Flaubert weighs on him; he rejects it at the price of intricate, self-conscious labour.

Three *causes célèbres* mark the development of the "new eroticism" in modern literature: the trial of *Madame Bovary* in January 1857, the decision of the United States District Court in the matter of *Ulysses* in 1933, and the unsuccessful prosecution of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in London in 1960. From the point of view of literary thought, of the argument between public norms and total imaginative possibility, only Judge Woolsey's ruling on *Ulysses* matters. But the dynamism of total explicitness, the attempt in serious literature to achieve a complete verbal re-presentation of sexuality begins with—or, more accurately, can be defined in respect of—Flaubert (and the indictment, shortly before, of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*). The confrontation between public censorship and the claims of the responsible erotic imagination was itself the result of specific and by no means self-evident sociological circumstances. The libertine fiction of the 18th century had gone well beyond anything we find in Flaubert; a number of Balzac's novels, such as *Le père Goriot* (1835) and *La rabouilleuse* (1842), had silhouetted if not directly rendered motifs of sexual pathology, of scabrous sexual malaise far more lurid than anything in *Madame Bovary*. It was not literature that had changed or swerved to sudden license; the alteration lay in the consolidation of middle-class taste, in the assumption, so characteristic of the mid-19th century, that bourgeois criteria of allowed sensibility, that the emotional habits and habits of a mercantile culture, embodied a controlling ideal. With the spread of cheap printing, moreover, and the new breadth of responding literacy, fiction had come to matter. The erotica of the *ancien régime* was elitist, as was the stylized diction in which it was couched. The art of Flaubert was, potentially at least, open to a much wider audience. Hence the subversive vitality of its challenge to the official community of good taste.

It is, at a distance, difficult to recapture outrage. The prosecution conceded Monsieur Flaubert's eminent talent; it was precisely this talent which made his novel so corrupting. "A moral conclusion cannot make up for lascivious details." The corset straps whistling snake-like around Emma Bovary's hips, the suave shudder of abandonment with which the young woman surrenders to Rodolphe—these were images that did not discredit realism but the art of fiction itself. "To impose on art the single rule of public decency is not to make art subservient—it is to do it honour." Maître Senard's defence of his client bore entirely on the question of motive. *Madame Bovary* is a profoundly moral work. "Death is in these pages." Each moment of erotic ecstasy is paid for a hundred-fold in suicidal disgust. The court agreed; whatever the "reprehensible vulgarity" of local touches, the novel as a whole aimed at a serious, indeed tragic, indictment of adultery. Looking back, Henry James reflected, "so far have we travelled since then—that *Madame Bovary* should in so comparatively recent a past have been to that extent a cause of reprobation; and suggestive above all, in such connections, as the large unconsciousness of superior minds." Unconsciousness, no doubt, to the shallow moralism and officious spleen that would greet the book; but not, one supposes, to the radical issue involved.

Flaubert does no less than assert—an assertion the more trenchant for being wholly a matter of mountainous technical labour, of professional *métier* carried to the verge of personal breakdown—that artistic excellence, the high seriousness of the true artist, carries its own complete moral justification. Even as it comes to active being in a sphere strangely between truth and falsehood, the work of art lies outside any code of current ethical convention. It acts on that code, qualifying and re-shaping it toward a more catholic response to human diversity. But it lies outside and its true morality is internal. The justification of a work of literature is, in the deep sense, technical; it resides in the wealth, difficulty, evocative force of the medium. Trashy prose, be it humanely purposive and moral in the utmost, merits censorship; because its executive means are inferior, because the way in which the thing is done diminishes the reach of the reader's sensibility, because it substitutes the lie of simplification for the exigent intricacy of human fact. Serious fiction and serious poetry cannot be immoral whatever their force of sexual suggestion or savagery of communicated image. Seriousness—a quality demonstrable solely in terms of the fabric itself, of the resources of metaphor drawn upon, of the arduousness and originality of linguistic statement achieved—is the guarantor of relevant morality. Seriously expressed, no "content" can deprave a mind serious in response. Whatever enriches the adult imagination, whatever complicates consciousness and thus corrodes the *clichés* of daily reflex, is a high moral act. Art is privileged, indeed obliged, to perform this act; it is the live current which splinters and regroups the frozen units of conventional feeling. That—not some modish pose of abdication, of other-worldliness—is the core of *l'art pour l'art*. This "morality of enacted form" is the centre and justification of *Madame Bovary*.

Is this assertion of necessary and sufficient internal morality true? Or, rather, what kind of truth does it argue? This, precisely, is the question which besets us a century after *Madame Bovary*, in a context more perplexing and urgent than any envisaged by Flaubert or his accusers. I will come back to it. What needs clarification here is the theory of language, of the relationships between language and imagination operative in the account of sexual experience in Flaubert's novel.

Recognition of the genius of the work has been accompanied, almost from the start, by a measure of discomfort. James found Emma Bovary "really too small an affair,"[4] a vessel too restricted for the subtle profusion of consciousness posited by the novelist. Taking as starting-point Flaubert's own record of his frenetic quest for *le mot juste*, the sentences recast twenty times in an agonized pursuit of uniquely appropriate cadence, Georg Lukács saw in *Madame Bovary* a crisis of confidence, a retreat from that imaginative ease in the real world which distinguishes classic art. Only a sensibility unhoused (which eviction Lukács ascribes to the philistine pressures on the artist of mature capitalism) could invest so passionately, and ultimately despairingly, in the autonomous reality of the word. Sartre's image of Flaubert as literally suffocated in the coils of a perfect style is merely a variant of Lukács's case. Flaubert's chronicle of martyrdom, of the insane pitch of effort at which he laboured to achieve a unique, unflawed authenticity of expressive form, contributes powerfully to the impression of coldness, of still air, many have experienced in reading and re-reading *Madame Bovary*. The death which Flaubert's advocate found in these pages is not merely one of moralizing verdict.

How does Flaubert's ideal of exhaustive explicitness actually work out in regard to the presentment of sexual experience, itself the most "extra-verbal" of human domains? Going back to the major instances, one realizes by how wide a margin of selective musicality and atmospheric inference Flaubert's narrative departs from any naive *verismo*.

> Çà et là, tout autour d'elle, dans les feuilles ou par terre, des taches lumineuses tremblaient, comme si des colibris, en volant, eussent éparpillé leurs plumes. Le silence était partout, quelque chose de doux semblait sortir des arbres; elle sentait son cœur, dont les battements recommenceaient, et le sang circuler dans sa chair comme un fleuve de lait. Alors, elle entendit tout au loin, au delà du bois, sur les autres collines, un cri vague et prolongé, une voix qui se trainait, et elle l'écoutait silencieusement, se mêlant comme une musique aux dernières vibrations de ses nerfs émus. Rodolphe, le cigare aux dents, raccommodait avec son canif une des deux brides cassée.[5]
>
> (Here and there around her the leaves were dappled with a flickering brightness as though humming-birds had shed their wings in flight. Silence was everywhere. Sweetness seemed to breathe from the trees. She felt her heart beginning to beat again, and the blood flowing inside her flesh like a river of milk. Then far away beyond the forest, on the other side of the valley, she heard a strange, long-drawn cry that hung on the air, and she listened to it in silence as it mingled like music with the last vibrations of her jangled nerves. Rodolphe, cigar in mouth, was mending one of the bridles with his pocket-knife.)

The Freudian valuations of that "river of milk" or of that cigar between lover's teeth are undeniable, as are the allegoric, traditional counters such as the broken bridle. But the specific miracle of the passage lies in Flaubert's simulation of Emma's return of consciousness after the sexual act. It is a simulation achieved by means of rhythm and image. The modulations in the past tenses of the verbs, the utterly deliberate punctuation and adjustment in the lengths of successive clauses, enforce on our own breathing, on the imitative somatic stance by which a reader responds to a suggested series of images, an exact counterpart to Emma Bovary's ebbing sensuality and tranquil, yet delicately haunted, peace. The symbolic properties invoked precisely sustain the intended feeling: that lengthy, vague cry beyond the woods resounds at moments lyric and ominous throughout Romantic literature; we hear a last ironic echo of it in the twang of the broken string in *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). The humming-bird plumage and dim softness out of the trees in the smouldering sunset (*dans la rougeur du soir*) belong to the stylized ecstasies of Romantic verse and fiction. Flaubert's use of them is adroit: they reflect both outward to our own sensibility and inward to the rhetoric of romance on which Emma Bovary feeds—a rhetoric precisely located for us by the fact that Emma, on returning home, immediately falls to dreaming of "the lyric legion" of adulterous heroines. In short, the reality of the passage is sensuously overwhelming. It elicits from us emotions, a physical and psychological *mimesis*, exactly correspondent to the narrative. But the reality is not one of obvious verbal facsimile. The rhythms are vividly, directly suggestive (as they are again in the notorious carriage-ride with Léon), not the actual terms used. Flaubert's eroticism is a matter of cadence. It is the theory of total expression, therefore, rather than the actual practice of *Madame Bovary* which proved exemplary.

In Flaubert, as in Baudelaire, the pursuit of explicitness was not an end in itself but part of a rigorous morality of aesthetic form. The explicitness achieved was still governed by considerations of stylistic elegance. In Maupassant, Zola, and the naturalistic movement, explicitness of a new, far more literal order breaks through. Integrity of representation came to replace integrity of artistic form as the essential criterion of seriousness. To say less than all was to abdicate from the novelist's intellectual and social function. The naturalistic writer saw himself as the peer of the physical scientist and analytic historian; his novels had to communicate a correspondingly anatomical and unflinching view of human affairs. No less than Symbolism (though the two movements are exactly opposed in their aesthetics) Naturalism moved on a wave of conscious anti-philistinism. To shock the bourgeois, to challenge the taboos of respectable speech, became an obligation. For his part the enlightened reader—"mon semblable,—mon frère!"—demonstrated his maturity and toughness of sensibility by concealing his shock or, indeed, spurring the artist to new audacities. The passage from *le mot juste* to *le mot exact* in the 1870s and 1880s was the result of a mutually accelerating impulse of both writer and reader. To that impulse increasingly graphic means of reproduction and direct reportage—the modern newspaper story, the photograph—brought a competitive challenge. To keep its grip on a public stimulated by but soon almost immune to all but the grossest intensities of journalistic description, the novel had to pass from image to picture. Hence the photographic insistence of the Goncourts, of Maupassant, and of Zola. A drastic advance toward erotic verisimilitude separates the language of *Nana* (1880) from that of Flaubert:

> Nana se pelotonnait sur elle-même. Un frisson de tendresse semblait avoir passé dans ses membres. Les yeux mouillés, elle se faisait petite, comme pour se mieux sentir. Puis, elle dénoua les mains, les abaissa le long d'elle par un glissement, jusqu'aux seins, qu'elle écrasa d'une étreinte nerveuse. Et rengorgée, se fondant dans une caresse de tout son corps, elle se frotta les joues à droite, à gauche, contre ses épaules, avec câlinerie. Sa bouche goulue soufflait sur elle le désir. Elle allongea les lèvres, elle se baisa longuement près de l'aisselle. . . . Alors, Muffat eut un soupir bas et prolongé. . . . Il prit Nana à bras le corps, dans un élan de brutalité, et la jeta sur le tapis.[6]
>
> (Nana gathered herself into a ball. A shiver of tenderness seemed to have passed through her limbs. Moist-eyed, she made herself small so as to feel her body more closely. Then she unclasped her hands and slid them down her body as far as her breasts, which she crushed in a nervous embrace. Her breasts out-thrust and as if melting into a caress of her entire body, Nana cuddled her cheeks, first right then left, against her shoulders. Her greedy mouth breathed desire across her own flesh. She pointed her lips and kissed herself, unhurriedly, near her armpits. . . . Muffat breathed a low, prolonged sigh. . . . He seized Nana, in a brutal rush, and threw her onto the carpet.)

Flaubert saw in *Nana* the triumphant culmination of an ideal of sexual candour which he himself had initiated and enforced on a hypocritical society: "que la table d'hôte des tribades 'révolte toute pudeur,' je le crois! Et bien! Après! merde pour les imbéciles."

Changes in the middle-class tolerance of sexual shock, the reluctance of the *imbéciles* to reveal themselves as such, whatever their private feelings, were hastened by an almost automatic linguistic mechanism. From *Nana* to *Ulysses* (1922) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), from *Lady Chatterley* to *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1966), a constant progression toward the limits of sexual explicitness is at work. Each advance brings with it, by a compulsive logic of formal structure, the need to take the next step, to bring verbal means another bit closer to complete erotic re-enactment (even as each increase of nakedness and allowed posture in the cinema or photography has brought us nearer to the open representation of intercourse). Flaubert and his naturalistic successors had set off a self-perpetuating dynamic inside the idiom of the novel. Often writer and audience exaggerate the spontaneity, the deliberate moral courage of the latest frankness. In the whole process a powerful linguistic automatism is manifest.

II

Since about 1890 homosexuality has played a large part in Western culture and, perhaps even more significantly, in the myths and emblematic gestures which that culture has used in order to arrive at self-consciousness. Artists who have covertly or publicly practised pæderasty and/or various modes of adult homo-eroticism hold an important, at certain points predominant place in modern literature, art, music, ballet, and in the minor or decorative arts. The tonality of the "modern movement," the theories of the creative act implicit in important branches of 20th-century arts and letters, cannot be dissociated from the lives and work of Oscar Wilde, Proust, André Gide, Stefan George, and Cocteau. From early rhapsodies or masques of Gide to the poetry of Allen Ginsberg and the fiction of James Purdy, James Baldwin, and William Burroughs, explicit homosexuality or homosexuality symbolically declared activates much that is most distinctive of the sensibility of the age. Why?

The phenomenon itself has been extensively studied; its causes and central energies remain obscure. It can be argued that the problem is one of optics, that homosexuality played no less of a role in Periclean Athens or Renaissance Florence, that the cultural elite of the rococo was no less inclined to homosexuality than the world of Diaghilev: the difference being, simply, one of the data available. But although there is something in this and although the salience of modern homosexuality is in part a visual effect—the surrounding medium of middle-class norms and a simultaneous loosening of verbal and legal taboos have made homosexuality more prominent—the facts are more stubborn and intricate. From *art nouveau* to "camp" and Gay Lib, homosexual codes and ideals are a major force. They seem to underlie, as if re-enacting their own solipsism, their own physiological and social enclosedness, that most characteristic of modern strategies: the poem whose real subject is the poem, art that is about self-possibility, ornament and architecture that have as their main referent not some grid of actual human use but other ornament or other form. So far as much of the best, of the most original in modern art and literature is autistic, i.e. unable or unwilling to look to a reality or "normality" outside its own chosen rules, so far as much of the modern genius can be understood from the point of view of a sufficiently comprehensive, sophisticated theory of games, there is in it a radical homosexuality. In other words, homosexuality could be construed as a creative rejection of the philosophic and conventional realism, of the *mundanity* and extroversion of classic and 19th-century feeling. That feeling produces works of art and literature which "look outward" for their meaning and validity, which accept authorities and solicit approvals outside themselves. The painting aims to "look like something in the real world," the poem has a final basis of verification in prose paraphrase or common sense, music has structures powerfully analogous to the syntax of common discourse. Heterosexuality is the very essence of such classic realism, of art and language that are centrally acts of communication, of relationship to the "outside." Where poetics after Mallarmé turn inward, where the subject of a painting becomes painting, where music and dance reject translation into any alphabet of exterior meaning, they seem to express needs and conceptions of self-sufficient form deeply related to homosexuality or to that abstraction of homosexuality which is narcissism. The mirrors of the modern shine inward in a probing, tormenting meditation on the self or on that "other" like enough to be its shadow (in Proust and Cocteau the iconography of "enclosedness" and the rules of the mirror-game are most consciously worked out).

On a simpler level, the homosexual current in post-symbolist literature may be understood as a strategy of opposition, as the artist's most emphatic stance against philistinism. Such a stance, which the artist himself often finds indispensable to sustain his creative solitude, became increasingly difficult to adopt as puritanism weakened. In the Romantic period the mere choice of art or literature as a mode of life had been enough to assert a rebellious eccentricity, a dissent from the social norm. Flaubert already found the process of necessary dissociation more difficult and made a constant, if muted, rebellion of the obsessive mania of his work. In Poe and Baudelaire drugs provide a haven, which is also an exile, outside the frontiers of the bourgeois order. As the artist became accepted, his rebellions blunted by the indifference or conventionalized shock of the now sophisticated public, his task of self-definition grew more arduous. Where could he find a genuine extra-territoriality, a posture genuinely offensive (in the sense both of attack and of provoked outrage)? The Verlaine-Rimbaud scandal and the career of Oscar Wilde gave to homosexuality representative, strategic values. The homosexual overlapped with the artist in being an outsider, a "grand refuser" of those standards of creativity and utilitarian relationship which define middle-class, industrial, post-puritan civilization. Homosexuality in part made possible that exercise in solipsism, that remorseless mockery of philistine common sense and bourgeois realism which is modern art. As the 20th century progresses other externalities, other "offending/offensive exiles" such as those of the Jew and of the Negro come to serve a strategic function for the writer and artist. A common narcissism and subversion relates these different creative masks. But whatever its sources, the homosexual current has produced much, one is tempted to say a major part, of what will stand in the treatment of love in modern literature.

Looking back at *Der Tod in Venedig* (1911) from the vantage-point of present overtness, one is struck by the hushed ceremony of the story, by Thomas Mann's unworried exploitation of allegoric pointers—the Wagnerian reference of the title, Aschenbach's name, the death-ship, the orgiastic nightmare, naked *amor* risen from the sea—no longer available to our "knowingness" (it is in the passage from knowledge to "knowingness" that I am trying to locate our theme). The tale looks back to civilizing encumbrances and dreams of reason which Mann knew to be doomed. Nevertheless it would be myopic to underestimate its sexual audacity. In a manner comparable to the love poetry of Donne, *Der Tod in Venedig* articulates, perhaps rediscovers, a death-haunted eroticism, a *morbidezza* in which a crisis of desire is made expressive of a far wider disorder of human values. The master of style discovers the intrusive inadequacy of speech: "Aschenbach understood not a word he said; it might be the sheerest commonplace, in his hearing it became mingled harmonies." The naked radiance of the boy liberates the great writer from "the marble mass of language." Eros overwhelms him: "Mind and heart were drunk with passion, his footsteps guided by the daemonic power whose pastime it is to trample on human reason and dignity." The betraying egoism of Aschenbach's experience, the fact that it is on Tadzio's mere shadow that he lavishes "lover-like, endearing terms"—there is never between the old man and the boy either touch or speech—only reinforces the mortal intensity of lust. Though explicitly linked to the poetic, partially allegoric pædophilia of the Platonic dialogues and the Socratic myth of *eros*, Mann's novella seems to initiate a series of similar narratives. From Gide's *Les faux-monnayeurs* (1926; The Counterfeiters) to Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) modern fiction has produced a number of remarkable realizations of an adult's sexual relation to a child or group of children. These encounters are almost invariably homo-erotic and it may be Nabokov's reversal that gives to *Lolita* some of its unsettling sparkle.

The case of Marcel Proust can hardly be touched on in a brief survey. But it is striking how largely Proust studies, voluminous and often intelligent as they are, have failed to grasp the nettle. The affair between the narrator and Albertine is one—and there are obviously not many in the history of art and literature—that literally enlarges the resources of our sensibility, that actually educates our recognitions to new possibilities of feeling. Proust has widened the repertoire of sexual consciousness. Areas of adolescent sexuality, of imaginary possession, of jealousy, of sexual loss have, through Proust's formulation, become larger or newly accessible. As is the uncanny case with very great art, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27; Remembrance of Things Past) has acted as a prescriptive mythology, calling into being nuances of emotion, twists of being and pretence, which were, somehow, a *terra incognita* of the self. Biographical information, in the matter of Proust over-abundant and therefore obscuring, leads one to suppose that Albert lives formidably in Albertine. The young woman, feminine and rounded as she is, masks what is, in some sense, the subterranean, more direct truth of homosexual love. So André Gide felt in his strictures on Proust's "insincerity." But the facts are even more tangled. We know that Albertine does incorporate the traits of women whom Proust knew and who, at some level of perceptual enchantment, meant much to him. Thus the foremost celebration of love in 20th-century literature is ambiguous to the core. But not ambiguous in any shallow, tactical sense manipulated by a critic. The Albert-Albertine figure, the narrator's transpositions between heterosexual and homosexual codes, belong to that strange suspension of sexual difference or rather to that fusion of erotic being which we find at certain particular summits in the Western tradition. The mysterious completeness of Proust's eroticism, mysterious because it is also an artifice, relates to the myth of sexual unison in the *Symposium*, to the androgynous conceit in some of Leonardo da Vinci's representations of the human figure, to the interchangeability and co-presence of masculine and feminine in some of the poetry and drama of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, and of Goethe's amorous elegies. Where our imagination moves deepest it strives beyond sexuality, which is, inevitably, division, to an erotic whole.

It is precisely against this wholeness, not against any simple heterosexuality, that Proust sets off the torturing incompletion of Sodom and Gomorrah. His detailed mapping of homosexual and Lesbian life and society has within it a moralizing, damning force. Charlus has an immensity of presence denied to Vautrin not only because Proust can go further than Balzac—he can detail the world of perversion in a way unavailable to the idiom of the 1830s—but because he is making a persistent tragic statement about the nature of human love itself. Because he is setting out, as Plato and Shakespeare did, the dialectic of identity and desire: how may we reach the beloved without destroying something of that principle of self from which love springs? In the homosexual and the Lesbian that paradox is frozen to sterile acceptance. The broken sphere of Plato's myth is made a treadmill. One need only re-read the close of the first chapter of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921–2; Cities of the Plain) to experience the underlying grimness of Proust's vision of Sodom and why total (therefore unattainable) communication with, total (therefore unattainable) possession of the beloved becomes to the narrator the very meaning of life. Thus Proust's homosexuality, though vitally significant, animates, as Gide's or Cocteau's do not, an imagined, a poetically experienced, completeness of love.

In Jean Genet there is no such completeness. On the contrary, there is a fierce striving for partiality, for the special point of view. The homosexual, criminal underground of Genet's novels defines itself by its derisive "otherness" (*altérité*). Its relation to established society is one of subversive travesty. Hence the dominant function of disguise, charades, masks, and transvestism in Genet's art. Above all, this travesty inspires Genet's genius for high rhetoric, his use of the French language at its most formal, of French prosody where it is most like Victor Hugo, to brazen the unspeakable. Genet makes every brutality and obscenity of homosexual relations explicit, but in a special highly original way. By spelling out *everything* in a style of lyric declamation, he creates a kind of solid, graphic unreality—as does a painting by Caravaggio. In Genet homosexuality becomes a "garden of love," divorced from ordinary society less by its bestial violence and elaborate slang than by its intense stylization, by the terrain it affords for play-acting, festive ceremonies, and unbridled pathos. Genet is heir to Maeterlinck and Yeats, to those who have sought a stage for action more formal, more rigorously aesthetic than that provided by realism. Reticence is one kind of stylization; total explicitness is another:

> Élève-toi dans l'air de la lune, o ma gosse.
> Viens couler dans ma bouche un peu de sperme lourd
> Qui roule de ta gorge à mes dents, mon Amour,
> Pour féconder enfin nos adorables noces.
>
> Colle ton corps ravi contre le mien qui meurt
> D'enculer la plus tendre et douce des fripouilles.
> En soupesant charmé tes rondes, blondes couilles,
> Mon vit de marbre noir t'enfile jusqu' au cœur.

> (Rise in the moonlight, my sweet jocko. Come and let a little heavy semen drip into my mouth, rolling from your throat to my teeth, Beloved, so as to make fruitful at last our adorable wedding. Glue your ravished body against my dying flesh, dying to bugger the most tender and sweet of rogues. While charmed I weight your round, blond balls, my black marble prick shafts you to the heart.)

It is impossible to "go further" than does *Le condamné à mort*. Yet such is the elevation of tone—with its echoes, at once parodistic and scholastic, of Victor Hugo, Rimbaud, and even Péguy—that the category of obscenity does not seem to fit. It is where the brazen singularity of vision falters, where naturalism and mere reportage corrupt style, that the matter of obscenity or motive arises (as it does in John Rechy's *City of Night* [1964] and Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, two books very probably inspired by Genet). Genet has made of violent, totally promiscuous buggery a world, a dramatic form, fantastic yet relevant by virtue of ironic mime to the mendacities and savageries of our normal, respectable condition.

Homosexuality has not been the only indirection of love explored by modern literature. The rapid erosion of verbal and representational taboos that follows on the work of Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing, and Freud has brought types of erotic behaviour previously restricted to straight pornography, to the twilit zone of *curiosa* and popular ethnography, or to forensic medicine into the repertoire of serious literature. It is difficult to think of any mode of sexual action—bestial, fetishistic, sado-masochistic, incestuous—that has not been shown in modern fiction or drama. Incest is, in the Freudian reading, a primary structure in evolving human consciousness. It has a dim but unmistakable centrality in Greek tragic mythology. In the return to Greek motifs of modern drama, incest has figured prominently. The richest, most humanely serious treatment of a brother-sister passion may be seen in Robert Musil's novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930–43; The Man Without Qualities). The work is incomplete and we cannot be certain that Ulrich and Agathe would have consummated their tense, searching need of each other. But what fragments we have of a third volume, especially the broken, dance-like exchange by moonlight, suggest Musil's broad grasp of the theme, his aim to make of it, as often in contemporary literature, a symbol of love seeking total communion, total privacy from the "otherness" of the world. A comparable equivalence between brother-sister incest and the general drama of human isolation can be seen, though on a slighter scale, in Cocteau's *Les enfants terribles* (1929) and Sartre's *Les séquestrés d'Altona* (1959; Loser Wins).

Clearly, however, it is in its uses of cruelty, of the sadistic components or aberrations of sexuality, that modern literature has gone furthest. Sadistic motifs and their interweaving with the erotic are perennial in art and literature; they play a pronounced role in the baroque and Gothic sensibilities. The image of love as a torturer, of a secret analogy between lover and beloved and torturer and tortured, seems archetypal to human consciousness. We find it memorably enacted in Hieronymus Bosch's gardens of delight. But the modern focus is different, at once more diffuse and more specific in its concentration on sadism in sexual phantasy and private life. From, say, Zola's *L'assommoir* (1878) to Pauline Réage's *L'histoire d'O* (1954) and William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* (1959), the explicitness of sadistic action has increased continually. Phantasies and presumed realities which had been the stock-in-trade of pornography have passed intact into serious literature. Sade has become both a dramatic emblem of man "at the outer edge" and the object of a modish philosophic and literary cult. I have written elsewhere[7] of some aspects of this obsessive imaginative exploitation of cruelty and erotic humiliation. Only the main points can be referred to here. Few topics provoke a more confident display of liberal cant. We simply *do not know* whether or to what degree sadistic literature initiates or quickens imitative behaviour (work under way on this question in clinical psychology is, as yet, rudimentary but results suggest that there *may* be a relationship between sadistic suggestion and subsequent conduct). The claim that sadistic literature merely induces masturbation and thus diminishes the individual or social potential for sadistic action may or may not be valid. It cannot, in either case, be naively generalized. The impact of sadistic proposals on the literate, otherwise engaged or furnished sensibility is wholly different from such impact on those whose imaginative lives are barren, hollowed by monotony, or ill-equipped to handle the conventions of unreality in a printed text (here the evidence of the Moors murder case seems pertinent).

The literary historian asks a different question: is the theme of cruelty and the associated obsession with violence in some way related to the political character of the age? Genet, Norman Mailer, William Burroughs have said that the bestialities recounted in their work mirror the crisis of inhumanity through which we appear to be living since 1914. A literature which failed to reflect modern barbarism, the widespread return of torture in political life, the programmatic degradation of the human person in concentration camps and colonial wars, would be a lie. There is unquestionably a truth in this argument. But it is not easy to judge whether the literature of violence does not at times anticipate, almost conjure up the facts (Céline would be a case in point), and whether anything is gained by adding, even in phantasy, to the energies of the inhuman.

Where the modern imagination *has* gone deeper than that of any previous age (though the recognition itself is as old as Aeschylus) is in its depiction of love and sexual encounter as power relations. We know more plainly than before, because Strindberg, Proust, D. H. Lawrence, and Beckett have taught us, that sexual relations are, in the sphere of intimacy, a reproduction of conflicts, alliances, strategic manœuvres as we find them in social and economic relations. The symbolic, psychosomatic links between sexuality and money are foreshadowed in Ben Jonson and explicit in Swift. But the close cross-hatching of social or economic metaphors with the "spontaneities" of love is very much a part of the development of the modern novel. We locate it first in Balzac and George Eliot; it is superbly exploited in James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Where erotic codes become more problematic, where power relations and the struggle for sexual domination sharpen, the sadistic motif—at its serious, tragic level—arises. Nowhere is the theme of erotic torment, this "daily pathology" of love, more powerfully dramatized, more illuminatingly related to economic and class conflicts than in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933). The *Romance* and *Wolf Solent* (1929) mark perhaps the only "advance," if such a term can be used, of the sexual imagination beyond Dostoyevsky and Proust. The eroticism of Powys is at once more extreme and more delicate than anything we find in Lawrence, but it is obscured by a private, often portentous rhetoric. If it was better known, "The River" chapter in the *Romance*, with its display of a "cold-blooded and elemental lechery," would have focussed many of the wonders and outrages lavished on the naiveties of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Like the famous suppressed chapter of *The Possessed* (1871), "The Iron Bar" in the *Romance* seeks out the dark common root of the nerve of cruelty and the nerve of desire. Owen Evans, like Powys himself, is half-crazed with sadistic imaginings. Cordelia Geard announces that she is with child:

> "What shall we call him if he's a boy, Owen?" Her voice just then was more than he could bear. Nothing makes human nerves dance with such blind fury as a voice piercing the hollow of the ear at the moment when the will is stretched out like a piece of India rubber on the rack of indecision.
>
> "Torture!" he shouted, sitting up in the purple chair and clutching its elbows furiously, while the rim of her hat was now completely crushed beneath him. "We'll call him Torture; and if she's a girl we'll call her Finis, the End. For she'll *be* the end. And all is the end."

There ensues one of the strangest, most compelling scenes of love-making in modern fiction. Ungainly, bewildered, yet instinctively clairvoyant, Cordy pulls off her clothes. She stirs "some deep chord of excited desire in the man with the burning eyes." Sexuality triumphs over sadism by enclosing it, by touching a common root, deep as life, inextricable as are within us the need to possess and the need to destroy.

It is not, however, in the treatment of deviance or sexual pathology that common sense would locate the most obvious, prodigal element of the new literary freedom. It is in the explicit rendition, particularly in the novel, of heterosexual intercourse. In a hundred years we have moved from the suggestive paraphrase of *Madame Bovary*—suggestive mainly in its hints of imitative cadence and in its invocation of symbolic props—to the following (two passages representative, current enough to have been chosen almost at random):

> It turned into a very serious session, no memorable jokes or clever ideas. He just stayed on top of her, embracing her buttocks to get her pressed against him and opening her cunt with his broad stiff staff. He got the head of his cock into the centre of her sex, and stayed on it, rubbed on it, without mercy. . . . Her spread legs pulled together and locked him to her, and her perspiring body got ready for the second time. . . . He fucked her until she was a hot river, until he could feel her not knowing or caring who or what the thing inside of her was. . . .[8]

> . . . I turned her over suddenly on her belly, my avenger wild . . . holding her prone against the mattress with the strength of my weight, I drove into the seat of all stubbornness, tight as a vice, and I wounded her, I knew it, she thrashed beneath me like a trapped little animal, making not a sound, but fierce not to allow me this last of the liberties, and yet caught, forced to give up millimetre by millimetre the bridal ground of her symbolic and therefore real vagina. So I made it, I made it all the way—it took ten minutes and

> maybe more, but as the avenger rode down to his hilt . . . she gave a last little cry of farewell, and I could feel a new shudder which began as a ripple, and rolled into a wave, and then it rolled over her. . . .[9]

The chronology of the change, of the successive advances toward total explicitness, is complex and would repay detailed study. The work of Zola and Maupassant marked a deliberate expansion of sexual designation. In so far as it addressed itself to the physicality of man, to society as biologically determined, the entire naturalistic movement—Gor'ky, Dreiser, Hauptmann—tended to a new erotic frankness. When the "breakthrough" comes, in *Ulysses*, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in the writings of Céline and Henry Miller, it does so on an explicitly linguistic level. The turn of sensibility toward a complete probing of sexual experience, the conviction that such experience is inseparable from the felt life of fiction, are manifest in Flaubert. The steps taken by Joyce or D. H. Lawrence are "technical," though in a sense that involves an entire philosophy of language and literary form. The taboos challenged and exorcised are those of vocabulary. What passes in the "place of excrement" and love itself are seen to be four-letter words, and are spelt out. What follows on Molly Bloom's reveries and the bucolics of Lady Chatterley is strictly inevitable, a *passage à la limite* in an almost algebraic sense. Given the new dispensation, each generation of fiction has gone a step further toward totality, toward *saying all* in words as graphic, as exact as the language can provide. There are stages on this *via amorosa*. William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (1931) and realistic crime fiction, related as they are to film and pulp writing, introduce a new authenticity of erotic slang and a cold, precise bawdy. The American novel comes out of World War II charged with a graphic economy of speech. By the late 1950s the semantic battles fought by Joyce and Lawrence had been won. No word, no turn of phrase was inviolate or exempt from public use. In Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), one of the finest novels written in English since the war, Ella is shown in a mood not wholly unlike Jane Austen's Emma:

> Now she cannot sleep, she masturbates, to accompaniment of fantasies of hatred about men. Paul has vanished completely: she has lost the warm strong man of her experience, and can only remember a cynical betrayer. She suffers sex desire in a vacuum. She is acutely humiliated, thinking that this means she is dependent on men for "having sex," for "being serviced," for "being satisfied." She uses this kind of savage phrase to humiliate herself.[10]

The delicate comedy of the passage, a comedy distinctly akin to *Emma*, lies precisely in the fact that these phrases are not "savage," that they echo a lost gentility, or rather a phase of mere "adult frankness" before total explicitness.

The sociological and psychological correlatives of this "frankness as never before" lie outside the scope of this chapter. They are very large. What failures of nerve in humane literacy, what distrust of the imagination, has brought on this obsessive, philosophically naive investment in the word? How does the common use, and hence devaluation, of what were, for a long time, the "private parts" of speech, the taboo idiom of intimacy or subterranean argot, relate to the much larger political, commercial, scientific assaults on privacy that mark our century? Or is there, on the contrary, an endeavour to strip such words of their numinous force, to bring language into daylight as Freud had brought the symbolic vocabularies of the unconscious? And in what way would such "enlightenment" relate to mass democracy, to a society intent on levelling taste? For the sense of audacity registered by the writer—when and especially when he insists on breaking a previous verbal taboo—is not one felt by the less educated, less privileged classes. To them the discourse of love has long been monosyllabic. To what extent is the accelerated movement toward complete explicitness in literature only a logical consequence of a movement of all narrative forms toward the techniques of the cinema? In other words, is sexual frankness in prose fiction merely another attempt at "verbal photography," at competing in language with the total *verismo* available to the camera and the tape-recorder? (In which context it is worth noting how closely the sexual revelations of such documentary records as Professor Oscar Lewis's *La Vida* [1966] now seem to resemble those imagined by novelists. The tape starts imitating the *cliché* of fiction.) What bearing has all this on the life of the imagination, a concept which has, I believe, a politically relevant and verifiable meaning? Already there is some evidence, though difficult to assess, of a standardization in sexual behaviour, of a decline from individuality and private discovery in this most inward, most vulnerable of psychic resources. Banality and brutality of idiom diminish the reach, the wondrous specificity of individual human consciousness. At the same time the new mythology of orgasm, of sexual prowess and ardent receptivity, may be setting standards of expectation, routines of high hope, in fact realizable by no more than a minority of human beings. So far as most ordinary men and women are concerned, the largesse and publicized splendours of the new sexuality are a lie, perhaps as corrosive as were the repressive daemonologies of puritanism or the cant (often exaggerated) of the Victorians.

III

The literary historian deals with smaller questions, though anyone seriously engaging problems of language touches on the human fact in its widest implications. How may one assess the effect of the new total freedom on the state of literary form, particularly of the novel?

In the art of Jane Austen a stylized idiom—stylized most coherently by what it excluded—served as a contract of permissible expectation between novelist and reader. The stability of vision which such a contract affords enabled the writer to work both economically and exhaustively; the area defined for imaginative penetration could be superbly exploited. But it was a limited terrain, better suited to the framework of stage comedy, with its necessarily public standards of speech, than to the new means and opportunities of the novel. Too much was left unsaid and, therefore, unrealized; or, more precisely, that which was excluded from the available vocabulary entailed additional omissions even wider in scope. Jane Austen's notorious indifference to the fierce historical, social crises which surround her life and her fiction is no accident, no contingent convention. It relates immediately to the exclusion of the new sense, so actively developing in the early 19th century, of the erotic and the unconscious. Jane Austen applies the same excluding idiom to the power relations of politics, class, and money as she does to those of sexuality—an idiom no longer consonant with the demands and possibilities of insight as we find them, say, in Stendhal. She keeps at bay, through a specific code of permissible expression, disorders of sensibility—erotic, financial, political—which would have marred the profound discipline and fineness of her design, but made of it a larger thing. The arrow that strikes Emma hits clean and sharp but passes too easily through a medium as thin and unambiguous as are the silhouettes prized by Jane Austen's genteel contemporaries.

The major, the "classic" phase of the novel, as it extends from George Eliot to Conrad, the early D. H. Lawrence, and Thomas Mann, seems to me inseparable from a definite creative tension between idiom and consciousness in the erotic domain. When we consider *Middlemarch*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Anna Karenina*, *Nostromo*, *The Rainbow*, *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain), we are made aware of a distinctive completeness of erotic intelligence. The novelist's view of the human person, of psychic processes, of the centrality of sexual experience, comes through to us at every point. Nothing germane to the psychological, social context need be omitted. The language of the novelist is comprehensive of all requisite perception; we sense immediately "behind" or within it a formidable, entirely verifiable, gathering of felt knowledge.

"Behind" or within it; this is my point. The explicitness is complete but *internal.* The failure of the Karenin marriage is drastic; the hurt and specificity of sexual crisis presses on the reader. But such are the authority and density of the medium, of the world which Tolstoy builds around each imaginative fact, that the crisis is conveyed to us through the simplest of images—a fire dying in the grate. The threefold relationship of Isabel Archer, Madame Merle, and Gilbert Osmond draws on elements of sadism, of sexual torment, of voyeurism as raw as any in present fiction. We are allowed no escape from the cruel insistence of James's understanding. But again, the relevant statements are made "internally"; it is the fullness and clear focus of invoked imagery, the control of relevant tone which inform, not the use of sexual terminology. The pathology of sex in Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924) is exact and pervasive. But the "facts" about Clavdia Chauchat or Mynheer Peeperkorn are communicated to us inside, as it were, the clarity, the strange cruel innocence of myth. No semantic "photography" is required. Undeniably, this distance between sexual awareness and idiom did pose problems for the novelist. I have suggested that the proliferating symbolism and paraphrases of James point to an unresolved inadequacy of expressive means; a similar malaise may be accountable for the portentous lyricism and obliquity of some of Conrad. But in *Middlemarch*, in *Anna Karenina*, in *The Bostonians*, in *Sons and Lovers* the tension between the known and the "out-spoken" produces a shapely stress and poise of imagination. And it is, by necessary extension, a poise and stress which allows, indeed compels the inclusion in the novel of political, economic, social reality. If the classic novel has produced an image of society more adequately complex and informed than any other in literature or history, it is precisely because it extends to society, to life as a whole, the organic view it takes of human love or human hatred. Sexual intelligence, kept so by avoidance of the falsifications of gross, explicit vocabularies, becomes political intelligence in the truest sense—in the sense of Stendhal, George Eliot, Tolstoy and the early Lawrence.

The change to a new verbal freedom, the drive for complete designation as it leads from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to Norman Mailer, has brought changes to the metaphysic, if that term is allowed, of the novel—changes first discernible in Flaubert's view of *Madame Bovary.* The contemporary novelist controls his characters as the classic novelist does not. This is a difficult point to make clearly, but its meaning—as Tolstoy has testified when noting the autonomous, scandalous vitality and "resistance" of his personages—is more than metaphoric. Every writer "invents" and thus governs the agents of his fiction, but George Eliot, Henry James, and Tolstoy seem to leave around men and women a zone of unexplored freedom, a kind of inviolate spring of independent life. This effect derives, I believe, from a crucial notion of privacy. There are elements, particularly sexual elements, in their personages which the great novelists fully realize but do not verbalize. They seem to accord to their own imaginings a certain privilege of discretion. It is by virtue of a discretion closely similar to that which we show toward other human beings that the fictions of *Middlemarch* or *War and Peace*—complex, rounded, never wholly known or mastered—stay with us. George Eliot, Henry James, and Tolstoy allow us, demand from us, a serious collaboration, because they signify completely but do not say, let alone shout, all. They draw our sensibility into a collaborative response. We imagine and, in some modest degree, we "create with them." We are neither found out nor expertly embarrassed in the act of reading (such embarrassment of the reader being a characteristic tactic of the new eroticism). The novelist guards our freedom of imaginative life as he does that of his characters. In the "new freedom" there is more than a touch of bullying. Our imaginings are programmed, obscene words are shouted at the inner ear. The new idiom has made it difficult to distinguish between integrity and mendacity. Of two passages quoted earlier (pp. 74–5), which is by a master of contemporary prose, which by a pseudonymous hack? Audacity, four-letter eloquence has rapidly become a *cliché*, a formulaic gesture as predictable as Petrarchan love-rhetoric and less varied. Loudness is poverty. *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) is not, at every point, a persuasive novel; we are asked to extend to the hero assumptions of poetic genius and corresponding political insight in fact appropriate only to Pasternak himself. Nevertheless, the relationship of Zhivago and Lara has assumed an almost magical authority in the modern poetics of love. Readers have felt here a maturity, a completeness of sexual realization hardly to be found elsewhere. Yet Pasternak's treatment is reticent in the extreme. His silences, like those of Tolstoy or Mann, seem to create meaning. The violences, the gusts of terror which surround Zhivago and Lara are as radical as any invoked in Mailer's *The American Dream* (1965) or *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. We emerge from both shaken, and, perhaps, instructed. But by calling on us to imagine, to give echo from the experienced if unspoken truths of our own privacies, Pasternak leaves us freer than he found us. A sexual idiom free from compulsive literalness is, I think, vital to this liberating effect.

The present code of sexual explicitness may be related to the general malaise of the novel. The inhumanities of speech and action so obsessively reproduced in many important contemporary novels have, as their natural counterpoint, the "non-humanity" of the *nouveau roman.* The human person is as splintered, as used and deformed in many modern novels as it is in certain schools of 20th-century painting and sculpture. It is as absent from the *nouveau roman* (or at least its theories) as from non-representational art. We have added many words to the vocabulary of fiction and drama. We say and show all (or will do so next month, next week). Have we lost the curious wonder of an imagined living presence, the paradox of reality by which Anna Karenina or Isabel Archer outlive their begetters and will outlive us? The "sexual revolution" in 20th-century speech, literature, and graphic representation may, in the final analysis, be rooted in a much deeper transformation of values. It is the nature of the individual, of identity as a sustained act of privacy, and the relationship of the individual to the fact of death which may be altering profoundly as we move out of the middle-class phase of Western history. The criteria of private sensibility, of literary survival as they are implicit in the post-Renaissance poetry and fiction, of a literate exchange between writer and reader, may belong to a receding, perhaps inevitably élitist past. The collective, cinematic future, the new codes of indifference now developing in regard to individual death or artistic fame, may render obsolete the conventions of literature as we have known them. These questions arise directly from any consideration of eros and idiom, but go far beyond it.

At the present juncture it would appear that "total emancipation" has in fact brought a new servitude, that literature, and especially prose fiction, is less free, less confident than it was. The collapse of taboos has led to a frenetic search for new shocks, for extremes of speech or behaviour as yet unexploited. This is an unfashionable view. And I reject—though very uneasily when it comes to sadistic writing—any form of imposed censorship. But one contemporary master, at least, is in favour of censorship, precisely on grounds of poetic freedom. Jorge Luis Borges writes:

> In distinction from mathematical or philosophical language, the language of art is indirect; its essential, most necessary instruments are illusion and metaphor; not explicit declaration. Censorship impels writers to use procedures which are of the essence. . . . A writer who knows his craft can say all he wishes to say without affronting the good manners or infringing the conventions of his time. One knows full well that language itself is a convention.[11]

The question is a difficult one, and censorship only a minor aspect. What is at stake is the education, the quickening of human feelings as against their diminution through simplification and brutality. Because it lies at the heart of consciousness, sexual experience offers both a denial and a challenge to the genius of language. It is through that genius that men have, at least until now, principally defined their humanity.

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As yet the study of conventions, of habits of social feeling, from a structural and linguistic point of view is in its rudimentary stages. Fundamental insights into the interactions between semantic codes and the structure of social usage (into the way in which a taboo or custom may come *after* the language-code that has suggested or defined it) have only lately become available to the literary historian and critic.

There are premonitions of the new way of "decoding" in the incomplete studies of the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) on Baudelaire and Paris in the 19th century; see, for instance, WALTER BENJAMIN, *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*, trans. by H. Zohn (London 1973). G. Legman's Introduction to "WALTER," *My Secret Life,* first published in 1962, is of pioneering interest. Erotic language and social response or presupposition are acutely examined in STEVEN MARCUS, *The Other Victorians* (London 1966). MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris 1966), is a summary statement of the new approaches to the phenomenology of narrative forms; a direct application of such approaches to the major novel is made in TZVETAN TODOROV, *Littérature et signification* (Paris 1967).

CHAPTER 3

Violence in Twentieth-Century Literature

Zev Barbu*

I

Violence is a loaded word; hence it has as many basic connotations as there are systems of values or cultures in the world. Thus, when the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1933) defines violence as "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property," the main assumption is that "persons," "personal autonomy," and "private property" are basic requisites for, and implicitly legitimatize, values in human life. But obviously this is only partly true. Leaving aside the institution of private property with its highly historical character, the integrity and autonomy of human personality is by no means as universal a value as it seems to be. One wonders, for example, whether and to what extent the killing of an old slave constituted an act of violence in the Roman society of the 2nd century B.C. Even the crime of parricide presents a problem from this point of view. Although it is normally regarded as a supreme act of violence, signifying the destruction of the very basis of social existence, i.e. of order and authority, it may, in some communities and under certain circumstances, constitute an act of piety, a consensual and even socially creative action. What for the ancient Greeks was a supreme case of cruelty, horror, and fear, and the source of tragedy as a literary genre, may for a contemporary Eskimo be a more or less ritualistic act of ingratiation.

Before we approach the question of the relationship between violence and literature, a few points of principle have to be made. Defined as a destructive type of behaviour, the significance of violence varies with the nature of the values affected by such behaviour. As just mentioned, even values normally considered as universal, such as "life," "survival," "personality," vary considerably in their meaning from culture to culture. If, for instance, we say that the dramatic genre, and tragedy in particular, is characterized by violence, we run the risk of equating the meaning of parricide in Aeschylian tragedy with that of suicide in the Kabuki drama, or the meaning of madness in Shakespearean drama with the meaning of self-alienation in Pirandellian drama. This poses an important and difficult problem for the present study, whose main task is to discuss the nature and the degree of violence in the literature of a given period. What are the basic values that such a literature attacks and destroys, and how does this compare with the literature of other periods?

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* Professor of Sociology, University of Sussex.

The significance of the above questions becomes obvious if one bears in mind—and this is the second point of principle that should be made here—that violence as a destructive mode of feeling, thinking, and acting constitutes an important theme in the literature of all times. Indeed, the literary phenomenology of cruelty, horror, and death is so rich and varied that it deserves a study by itself. As far as Western literature is concerned one can start with Homer and the Bible and follow it in an almost uninterrupted development punctuated by a series of peaks, such as the heroic epic, the picaresque novel, the Gothic novel, and so on up to the contemporary literature of protest and violence. Furthermore, it constitutes the core of drama as a literary genre, from Greek tragedy to the present-day Theatre of Cruelty. In a word, the phenomenon of violence is so central to literary creation of any kind—the Bible is also "apocalyptic," the *Divina commedia* includes such terrifying episodes as the story of Ugolino—that it is legitimate to ask why this should be so?

One can distinguish two main types of approach to this question. There is first of all an instrumentalist, often moralizing type of approach according to which the theme of violence, like that of sex, is consciously or unconsciously used by the writer—and deliberately exploited by various market agencies—for the purpose of increasing the appeal and circulation of his work. This is the manner in which Samuel Johnson, to give a well-known example, accounts for, and fulminates against, the dominant part played by the motif of violence in the post-Restoration novel and drama. That Dr Johnson's views contain a great deal of truth hardly needs demonstrating. His indignation, however, would have been considerably greater had he for a moment realized that he was dealing with a particular case of a more general phenomenon. To understand this, it is necessary to outline briefly a more recent type of approach to the above question according to which violence, as the term has just been defined, is closely and essentially connected to the process of literary creation itself.

The first contribution in this direction has been made by psycho-analysis and, generally speaking, by those branches of modern psychology that are particularly concerned with the deep motivation of human behaviour. We need mention here only some of their more salient points. Thus, according to one theory upheld by Freud and most of his followers, literature, like dreaming, is an expression at the phantasy level of repressed impulses, as well as of all states of mind resulting from the process of repression itself. As aggressive and destructive impulses are among those most strongly repressed in all cultures, literature is bound to be concerned with them—more precisely, with two compensatory types of mental states aroused by repression: with fears, anxieties, and guilt on one side, and with euphoric and violently self-assertive feelings on the other. On the basis of this principle, much so-called primitive art, for example, can be seen, first, as an expression of strongly repressed fears, whence its horror effect; second, as a defence against and flight from an unfriendly external reality, whence its symbolic and abstract character; and third, as an outlet for repressed aggression, and an expression of omnipotence, whence its magic character. And this is true not only of primitive art; for the main claim of the proponents of this type of approach is to have worked out a general theory of literary and artistic creation. Consequently, they speak in the same, or similar, terms about the motivation of all kinds of literature, and particularly modern literature, which they often compare with the reality-evading or reality-destroying phantasies characteristic of schizoid or paranoid persons. This is obviously an exaggeration. And yet it points to an idea that has a particular relevance in the present context. This is that the poet, the creator of literary fiction in general, is not only a dreamer, an escapist; he is also a deviant and a destroyer of established values and patterns of behaviour. In a psychological sense, he represents a prototype of violent action and style of life, a professional structure-breaker, at least in terms of feelings and language.

The above idea has recently received considerable support from a number of theories concerned with the social nature and function of literature. Although working independently and following different aims, the proponents of these theories have in common a twofold idea: first, that literature is the expression of what is atypical, deviant, and conflictual in society; and secondly, that this is more noticeable in periods of great literary innovation. Because this seems to contradict an older and more conservative thesis, according to which literature has an essentially consensual function in society by expressing and re-enforcing accepted or acceptable norms, it would be advisable to illustrate the point with a few examples. To start with, the coincidence of the rise and spectacular development of drama as a literary genre and historical periods of social upheavals, such as the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. in ancient Greece and the 17th century in Western Europe and in Japan, is a fact that has attracted considerable attention. This and similar considerations have led the sociologist Jean Duvignaud to maintain that drama expresses a state of social disorganization (*anomie*), and that consequently the dramatic hero is a social deviant, a fictional expression of what is atypical, whence revolutionary, in society. Moreover, the theatre itself expresses the same general condition, for the idea (or rather the practice) of "representation" is rooted in the human need, individual and collective, to act out feelings, situations, and roles that are blocked by the very process of social organization. To go back to the idea of violence, the artist has a protean and anarchic role, a role to destroy all roles, and the theatre as a whole expresses a state or process of permanent revolution in society.[1] A similar, though more limited, thesis on the social background of drama has been put forward by other authors. Lucien Goldmann, for instance, sees a close connection between the drama of Racine and the discontent with, withdrawal from, and rebellion against the world of a specific social "class" (*les robins*) in 17th-century France.[2]

Other scholars have examined the connection between "delinquency" and the rise of the picaresque novel, and with the exception of Professor Parker,* all see a positive connection.[3] But even Parker admits that "the picaresque novel has its origins in the movement of religious reform," and in 16th-century Spain this movement could be considered a form of deviation. Similarly, in Professor Fiedler's discussion of *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), the term "revolution" occurs almost as often as the term "novel." The title is slightly misleading, for Fiedler's study is concerned with the rise of the early novel, and the Gothic novel in particular, not only in America but also in England and France. Briefly, his thesis is that the rise, and particularly the structure, of the early novel have to be understood within the social context created by the great democratic revolutions of the period. The Gothic novel is a fictional expression of the struggle for the rights of man, of the war of liberation—political, social, and psychological—in the 18th-century Western societies.

If violence is so essentially related to the process of literary creation, one may ask whether the period under consideration presents a special case from this point of view. To what extent can one say that violence constitutes a special problem in 20th-century literature? Obviously the question can be tackled in more than one way. It would be tempting, for instance, to devise a method—a sort of content analysis—whereby to assess and compare the frequency of the motif of violence in the literature of various periods. Although this type of approach presents advantages from an empirical point of view, the enterprise in itself goes far beyond the scope of this study. On the other hand, a closer examination of the relevant material leaves one in no doubt that the problem to be dealt with is one of quality rather than quantity. In other words, the main characteristic of the period lies in the specific manner in which the motif of violence has been used by various writers, and above all, in the specific significance that violence has for their work, as well as for their way of life. Briefly, the main contention of this study is not only that the motif of violence occupies a central place in 20th-century literature, but that it would be difficult, and perhaps impossible, to understand adequately the meaning that this literature has for us without taking violence into account. For this reason let us examine the problem in two ways, descriptive and analytical. Although the first is meant to be a more or less systematic presentation of the theme of violence, the discussion will be organized around a series of main trends that seem to have a particular significance for the modern period.

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* See his discussion of this question in Vol. III, "The Picaresque Novel."

II

The motif of violence is central above all to the drama of the 20th century. Violence, of course, has always been an integral part of tragedy. But whereas in Greek tragedy, for instance, the scenes of violence take place offstage, in modern drama they take place on the stage. Moreover, the direct perception of such scenes is often considered as a constituent of the dramatic situation. This is obviously an important fact, although in the present context its explanatory value is limited. For one thing, death and crime, the moral shock and feeling of imminent threat to the collective conscience epitomized in the act of parricide, lie at the very root of drama. Furthermore, direct exposure of the audience to this type of action is as much, if not more, characteristic of the drama of other periods—of the Elizabethan drama, for instance—as of 20th-century drama. What seems to be characteristic of 20th-century drama is the moral and psychological context of violence.

In a comparative analysis of ancient and modern drama, K. von Fritz has noted a growing process of particularization and relativization of the dramatic situation.[4] Although it dealt with recognizable individuals and specific characters, Greek tragedy represented conflicts rooted in the human condition. When he compares this with the works of a modern playwright such as Bertolt Brecht, von Fritz sees that the dramatic situation does not now consist of man's gigantic and "impossible" struggle to escape and overcome his moral condition, but treats rather of his calculated effort to change, and more precisely to revolutionize, society, and not society in general but a particular type of society. Thus, Aeschylus aims at demonstrating that Orestes is doomed by forces beyond human control, that he suffers and inflicts suffering owing to an objective and absolute necessity. Brecht's heroes, on the other hand, suffer or inflict suffering because they are "rich" or "poor," "capitalists" or "proletarians," "tyrants" or "tyrannized"—in short, because of a transient (or at least a man-made) condition in their society.

In other words, the kind of human situation depicted by modern drama, of which Brecht's drama is only one example and perhaps not the most representative one, is more contingent than that depicted by Greek tragedy. For this reason, the suffering and violence inherent in such a situation appear not only less justifiable and redemptive, but often absurd, and therefore all the more terrifying. To put it differently, an act of violence committed in a context that in principle allows for non-violent alternatives appears as sheer destructiveness. Von Fritz reinforces this idea by his remarks concerning tragic guilt. The heroes of Sophocles and Aeschylus are placed in situations in which they cannot act otherwise: their fault and guilt are inseparable from necessity, and cannot be imputed to them as autonomous agents, or derived from a flaw in their personal character. Their guilt cannot be assigned to a specific condition or characteristic of man in general, such as Original Sin, but rather to a more diffuse set of circumstances surrounding, rather than residing within, man. Modern drama not only departs from this position, but has developed and is still developing in opposition to it. The first signs of this appear very early, and are all the more conspicuous when the intention of the playwright is to revive or simply to reproduce the style of Greek tragedy. In *Horace* (1640), Corneille creates the tragedy of "guilty passion," a type of play in which the conflict and suffering are ultimately determined by psychological imbalances. Similarly, Schiller's drama of predestination *Die Braut von Messina* (1803) leads to a kind of guilt for which the hero as an individual is ultimately responsible.

Although von Fritz does not extend this type of analysis to contemporary drama, he outlines a development that can easily be identified: the tragic situation tends to become so particularized that the conflict, suffering, and guilt involved in it can hardly be attributed to anything but the mental oddity of one or more individual characters. The tragic hero can often be a "ready-made villain" arousing in us fear of and anger against him, rather than the feeling of divine anger. In such a situation, any act of violence tends to be perceived as a personal threat rather than an insurmountable condition of human existence.*

Two closely interrelated trends stand out at the very beginning of the period—in the psychological drama of August Strindberg (1849–1912), and in the German expressionist drama that began just before World War I and ended in the mid-1920s. To say that Strindberg's theatre is dominated by the theme of violence and cruelty is obviously not enough. The great achievement, and indeed the essence, of his art consists in putting on the stage characters who act basically under the impact of their aggressive impulses, and in so doing victimize others and finally become themselves victims of their uncontrolled and uncontrollable violence. It is mainly on this basis that they appeal to our understanding and compassion: in other words, it is on these grounds that they claim, and sometimes achieve, dramatic status. As to the nature of such a type of dramatic situation, it should be enough to add that Strindberg's heroes are neither simply frustrated nor socially deprived, i.e. merely rebels against established society: they have deteriorated inwardly, as in *Fröken Julie* (1888; Miss Julie), or are deteriorating, as in *Fadren* (1887; The Father), and they are in rebellion against everything, including themselves. Their drama is one of total destruction, a tragedy of paranoiac warfare.

Violence as an unavoidable condition of human existence is a basic feature of German expressionist drama. This is amply illustrated, among others, by the plays of Frank Wedekind (1864–1918). Unlike Strindberg, who concentrated on character analysis, Wedekind used strong lyric and epic devices, often on a melodramatic scale, in order to express the undercurrent of cruelty and violence in human life. *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891; Spring's Awakening), first staged in 1906, is a story of adolescent love, in which the girl (Wendla) dies after an abortion, and the boy (Moritz) commits suicide. In a later scene, his ghost reappears carrying its head in its hands. Two other well-known plays by Wedekind, *Der Erdgeist* (1895;

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* Since this chapter was written (1969) a number of important studies have thrown new light on this, and particularly on the social and cultural framework of Greek tragedy. Especially relevant in this respect is JEAN-PIERRE VERNANT and PIERRE VIDAL-NAQUET, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (1972). In light of this it is necessary to emphasize that we are not concerned here with a critique of von Fritz's thesis. His insistence on the radical difference between ancient and modern drama creates many difficulties of interpretation. One might argue, for instance, that to the extent to which Oedipus suffers from an excessive thirst for knowledge, Sophocles' drama contains an element of "guilty passion." One might also say that Euripides is much more modern than von Fritz is ready to admit, and that H. D. F. Kitto's interpretation of Jason as a "ready-made villain" has more than a grain of truth. But these and other points of detail do not bear upon our present argument. The specific question with which we are concerned here is whether, and the extent to which, von Fritz's insights are borne out by the latest stage in the development of the genre.

The Earth Spirit) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1904; Pandora's Box), deal with Lulu, a woman of turbulent, rather abnormal character, whose three husbands meet violent deaths: the first dies of a stroke after finding her in another man's arms; the second, horrified at her depravity, slits his own throat; and the third is shot by Lulu. Later, she joins the underworld of Paris and London society, and is murdered by Jack the Ripper. Wedekind's favourite play, *Der Marquis von Keith* (1901), deals with a rogue and crook whose mistress, Molly Griesinger, drowns herself. After her body has been found in a pond, it is carried dripping onto the stage.

In Wedekind's plays the violence is frequently softened or at least surrounded by a lyrical melodramatic climate. In the plays of his follower, Georg Kaiser (1878–1945), violence is brought onto the stage in its most naked form. Most characteristic in this respect is Kaiser's trilogy *Gas—Die Koralle* (1917; The Coral), *Gas I* (1918), and *Gas II* (1920). In typically expressionist manner the main character has a generic name, the Billionaire, whose identity is interchangeable with that of his Secretary—a way of indicating that the individuals with their personal aspirations and achievements are but straws in the wind of violent passions or violence *tout court*. In the first part of the trilogy (*Die Koralle*) the Billionaire murders his double, the Secretary, and takes from him his identity mark, a piece of coral; as a result of this he is arrested for supposedly killing the Billionaire and is put to death.

In *Gas I* the Billionaire's son has taken over the gas-producing factory and runs it according to progressive principles by giving the workers a share of his profits. But there is an explosion (which takes place on the stage), and the whole enterprise is destroyed. Instead of rebuilding the factory, the Billionaire's son proposes to the workmen that they take the land for farming; but the idea is strongly opposed by the Engineer, who argues for material progress. The state steps in, and the manufacture of gas continues. Struck by a stone during a riot, the Billionaire's son has a dying vision of an enlightened mankind. But there is no hint of this in the last part of the trilogy, *Gas II*, which takes place a generation later when the country has been defeated in a war. The factory is now owned by the great grandson of the Billionaire, who is known as the Billionaire Worker. He opposes the Engineer, who has invented a death-gas bomb to use against the occupying enemy. When the workers side with the Engineer, the Billionaire Worker explodes the new bomb, which annihilates the entire world.

Before passing on to other characteristic trends in European drama, it is necessary to discuss briefly one of the main representatives of the American drama of this period, Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953). The reason for this is twofold. First, many of his plays, if not his dramatic vision in general, abound with violent characters, and particularly with scenes of physical and mental violence. This is particularly true of such plays as *The Emperor Jones* (1920), which ends with the main character being hunted offstage and "the reports of several rifles sound from the forest, followed a second later by savage exultant yells"; *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1923), with Ella's murderous attack on her Negro husband Jim; *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), with its mood of stark tragedy and the murdered baby lying in the crib; and finally *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* (first staged in 1956), of which John Chapman aptly said, "it could do with a murder . . . or two, or three, for its mood is dark and tragic." Second, O'Neill's best-known play, *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), provides an important insight into the meaning of violence in modern drama. This is not because the volume of crime is unusually high (two murders on stage, and two suicides just offstage) but because of the primitive, rather dehumanized, atmosphere of the play as a whole. The play is meant to be an adaptation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy. On his return from the civil war, General Ezra Mannon is poisoned by his wife Christine after she has first confessed—or tortured him with her confession—about the love affair between her and a sea captain, Adam Brant. Lavinia, the daughter of General Mannon and Christine, discovers the murder and, together with her brother Orin, decides to avenge it. Orin goes to the cabin of Brant's ship and (in the words of the stage directions):

> Orin steps through the door and with the pistol almost against Brant's body fires twice. Brant pitches forward to the floor by the table, and rolls over, twitches a moment on his back and lies still. Orin springs forward and stands over the body, his pistol aimed down at it, ready to fire again.

On learning of this Christine shoots herself, to Orin's horror ("Why did I have to boast of killing him?"). The shot has been heard by the audience, which also hears the shot that causes Orin's death.

There are two important points to be made with regard to the difference between Aeschylus's trilogy and O'Neill's somewhat crudely adapted version of it. First, in Aeschylus's trilogy both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are murdered offstage; Orestes appears beside their bodies as the platform (*okkyklema*) is rolled in. Secondly—and this is a far more essential point—a general climate of legend and myth surrounds Aeschylus's play (a doom haunts the house of Atreus, and the tribe of Agamemnon is fated). In

O'Neill's play, on the other hand, the audience is exposed to a chain of crime set up by an adulterous love affair. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether one can find anything in the climate of opinion surrounding the play—that is, bourgeois conventionality, Christian beliefs about the sacred character of conjugal family life, the wrath of God—by which the authors as well as the victims of the crime can be justified or redeemed. The answer is no; and, because of this lack of balance between action and justifying beliefs and values, the violence of the play becomes sheer cruelty. In other words, being completely deritualized and demythologized, violence becomes horror, and its dramatic effect sheer shock.

This idea may be illustrated with regard to another play based on Aeschylus's house of Atreus: Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les mouches* (1943; The Flies). Here, too, the murder of Aegisthus, who does not defend himself, takes place before the audience. When Orestes strikes him with the sword, Aegisthus sways and clings to Orestes; they continue their dialogue, Aegisthus groaning with pain until Orestes cuts him down. While Electra addresses the body of Aegisthus, one hears offstage the screams of Clytemnestra as Orestes kills her. Electra rejoices, and at last Orestes re-enters with the bloody sword.

An important difference must also be observed in connection with Sartre's play, however. Whereas O'Neill's drama has no philosophy, apart from that vaguely suggested by the Greek myth or by the primitive nature of its main characters, Sartre's play has an almost explicit philosophy in which violence is justified on two scores. First, he makes us feel that the stage is a *tribunal* with a well-defined area of competence. People kill and are killed, and their drama is propelled neither by blind fate, nor by divine justice, nor even by some general principles of human reason, but by historical necessity. Bearing in mind Sartre's other plays as well as his later philosophical orientation, we might say that the stage is a historical tribunal with a portrait of Marx or Lenin hanging on the wall. Thus Aegisthus behaves like a member of a doomed class; he does not defend himself, he even tells us that he wishes to die, while Orestes, the new man, and the hero of the people, kills him with gusto. Violence occurs in an atmosphere of revolutionary legitimacy.

All this is reinforced by another philosophical ingredient of Sartre's drama, his anti-religious brand of Existentialism, according to which violence—that is, defence against the encroachment of the "other," be it an individual person or society at large—is a necessary means of achieving and maintaining one's authentic existence. In Sartre's plays, however, the means often becomes an end in itself: violence is often suggested as the *via* *regale* leading to an authentic mode of being. This idea will be taken up at a later stage; for the moment it should be enough to point to the unusually rich phenomenology of violence in Sartre's drama. It can be revolutionary violence as, for instance, in *Le diable et le bon Dieu* (1951; Lucifer and the Lord), in which the peasants are advised not to accept the land as a gift from the landlord, not to change an economic into a moral servitude, but to seize it in a truly revolutionary style. The tragic dilemma of the play consists not in choosing between absolute and irreconcilable values but between killing 200 priests or 200,000 peasants. It can also be a thinly disguised psychological violence, as in *Les séquestrés d'Altona* (1959; Loser Wins), in which an oppressive authoritarian father, a symbol of the fatherland, clashes with and destroys his son, his family, and finally himself in an atmosphere of dignified rage, or in *Huis-clos* (1945; In Camera), with its self-mutilating, self-dismantling characters.

This is the place to distinguish between two aspects of violence as revealed by 20th-century drama. Sartre (b. 1905) can, in many respects, be described as an apostle of violence; even in his role of pacifist he acts like an angry judge setting up tribunals all over the world. Although no less concerned with the theme of violence, Albert Camus (1913–60), one of Sartre's early friends, deals with it in a different manner. *Caligula* (1944), a play of unusual violence, concludes with the conspirators striking Caligula down with their daggers. Just before the assault, he has shattered the mirror that for him reflects the absurdity of existence. There is a suggestion here, characteristic of Camus's philosophy of rebellion, that violence destroys itself.

III

We can now turn to other aspects of our topic. Owing to the complex nature of the problem, we have to confine the discussion to those trends in 20th-century drama in which violence appears not as a psychological accident or as an element of characterization, but rather as a central theme in a broader conception of human existence. Three such trends are relevant, the Theatre of the Absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty, and the "angry" generation of the 1950s.

"The angry young men" were certainly a rather heterogeneous group of novelists, poets, and playwrights, but the mood of their writing is worth considering here. As the expression suggests, their writing is dominated by a mood of rebellion against the *status quo* in their society or (to use one of their favourite expressions) the establishment. "Mood" is just the right word, for the social consciousness of "the angry young men" is not particularly clear; they feel more than they think or act, and consequently they often create in their writing a mood of violent yet useless protest. This is illustrated by the dramatic writing of the best-known and in many ways most representative of the angry young men, John Osborne. His *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is a fierce verbal and mental assault during which the main character, Jimmy Porter, mocks conventional morality, patriotism, and civic responsibility; he attacks and almost morally destroys his wife, her friend, and her family, until he finally creates a moral vacuum around himself from which he tries to escape by a sort of symbolic regression into the animal world of simple and spontaneous impulses. Throughout this sordid and violent "happening," Jimmy Porter reiterates his case history: born into an honest under-privileged family, he was separated from his mother at an early age, was educated by and for the establishment, and married a middle-class girl. The reverberations of Osborne's anger against the hollowness of contemporary England—"riding into the Promised Land in a mini"—are heard in later plays such as *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964), *A Patriot for Me* (1965), or even *The Entertainer* (1957). But the hollowness within, the source of the invective, is seen to be as much subjective as objective, a social attack made from a weak personal position. Osborne's satire is sometimes nearer to the abuse of Dadaism than to morally inspired satire.

The Theatre of the Absurd is a big and still growing literary enterprise represented, among others, by Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee. Perhaps the most significant in the present context is Jean Genet (b. 1910), who is, or has been until recently, a practitioner of violence. According to Sartre's view—in *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (1952)—he is the paradigm of existentialist man who no longer distinguishes between good and evil, and hence is perfectly adjusted to this hopeless world in which the individual's isolation and loneliness is heightened with passion. One has only to say that in Genet's drama this passion is dark, negative, and anarchic. The setting of one of his best-known plays, *Le balcon* (1956; The Balcony), is a brothel in which the characters act out their phantasies: one dresses like a bishop; another whips a girl whom he forces to wear a horse's tail. The tense atmosphere, with a revolution raging outside, reaches a climax when one character mimics an act of self-castration.

Although violence occurs frequently in other representatives of the Theatre of the Absurd, it is on the whole less terrifying, less studied and deliberate, than in Genet's work. Ionesco (b. 1912) often manages to disguise it under the farce-like style of his plays or to damp its presence in grotesque and symbolic language. In two of his plays, however, violence and cruelty are heightened to such a degree that they gain a new existential* significance. *La leçon* (1951; The Lesson) begins grotesquely enough with a girl taking a lesson in mathematics from a wildly nervous professor who, we are told, has killed 39 other students. At the end the girl is stabbed to death while the 41st victim is knocking at the door. Criminal assault becomes a kind of "necessary" conclusion to a world of senseless behaviour and desperate isolation. *Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser* (1954; Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It) is a lugubrious farce in which a corpse, presumably the *alter ego* of the main character, grows steadily until it occupies the whole room, and death becomes more real than life.

But whether direct or disguised and symbolized, violence and cruelty are ubiquitous in the Theatre of the Absurd. Indeed they constitute an enveloping *milieu*, a sort of cosmic terror that prevents the characters from living, understanding, and communicating with each other; this is particularly revealed in some plays by Beckett (b. 1906) and Pinter (b. 1930), such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and *The Caretaker* (1959). In this atmosphere of despair, violence (bouts of rage, assaults, crime, suicide) constitutes sometimes the only means of self-assertion, the only way of establishing one's own authenticity. The typical dramatic situation created by the Theatre of the Absurd can briefly be described as a crisis of identity. In their search for identity the characters often take the road of anti-conventionality and rebellion, and in doing so they become anti-heroes. This means, however, that they are in no sense typical men, but rather men without qualities (that is, without a past and without a future) or else cynics and immoralists.

If the Theatre of the Absurd has any cathartic effect it is a diffuse and ambivalent one; sometimes a feeling of oppressive, terrifying fate intermingles with feelings of profound sadness and compassion aroused by the futility of human life. On other occasions, the oppressive atmosphere is not taken seriously, with the consequence that the senseless and the grotesque turn into the ridiculous, and the tragic becomes comic. One can equally cry and laugh at the heroes of Beckett or Ionesco—the latter has stated explicitly that he writes tragi-comedies.

None of the above definitions can be applied to the Theatre of Cruelty, however, which is not merely a separate genre but also, and primarily, a new conception and practice of the art of drama as such. Although it developed and flourished mainly in France, where Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) was its main proponent, the Theatre of Cruelty has deep roots in modern European drama, its immediate predecessors being the psychological drama (of Strindberg, for example), and the expressionist drama. Moreover, in Artaud's view, it is a natural outcome, a final expression, of what the theatre was originally meant to be. This dramatic "ideal" has repeatedly been lost sight of (he believed) during the history of the European theatre, where conventions of restraint, realistic imitation, or didactic purpose have disguised or diminished its primitive source of power. Artaud set himself the revolutionary task of restoring it in its original form: the Theatre of Cruelty.

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* The meaning of this recently rather overworked word is discussed in Vol. V, "Irrationalism," and illustrated in Ch. 4, "Absurd Art, Absurd Man, Absurd Heroes," of the present volume.

What is characteristic of the Theatre of Cruelty is not merely a way of writing, but also a method of acting and representation, and ultimately a very articulate philosophy of life. The idea is to shake the actor, the plot, and (above all) the audience out of any conventional mode of feeling, thinking, and acting in order to demolish what a sociologist would call the normative structure of social life. Hence cruelty, deliberate and demonstrative "slow-motion" crime, complete with blood, constitutes the essence of the "show." The term "show" (spectacle) is deliberately used, for the aim of the Theatre of Cruelty is to envelop the audience in an atmosphere of violence and horror, to intensify such an atmosphere to the point of making everyone feel the *Lust am Vernichten* (pleasure in destruction) that Nietzsche ascribed to the Superman.

The reference to Nietzsche is not accidental for, according to Artaud, the central aim of the Theatre of Cruelty is destruction, or rather destructiveness, as a mode of being. He argues that the Theatre of Cruelty is the antithesis of classical tragedy as defined by Aristotle, who insisted on the positive elements of tragedy—fear and pity leading to catharsis, whence reintegration and reconciliation with common reality. By contrast, Artaud stresses the negative aspects of the drama—that is, the destruction of common reality. We do not write plays (he argues) to capture, portray, or represent life as it is; we do not go onto the stage in order to act, feel, or speak as we do outside the theatre. On the contrary, we do all this to escape—more precisely, to destroy—our conventional mode of being, together with the society and history to which it is tied. The Theatre of Cruelty is a total release of the inner forces of life, a perpetual form-breaking. That is why violence is both a means and an end, a prerequisite of the dramatic art. On this point Artaud formulated a number of suggestive expressions, such as that theatre is rooted in "parricide," that it is "permanent desacralization," "nightmare coming true," and, last but not least, that theatre is "anti-mimesis." The theatre is never "representation," but rather *spectacle*, *feast*, *dance*, and *revolution*.

Admittedly, what has been said so far refers to the Theatre of Cruelty as a theoretical concept. As a social and cultural phenomenon it has been known in France for the last three or four decades, and from there it has spread under various forms to other parts of Europe. Despite its relatively limited influence, it constitutes one of the most significant developments in 20th-century drama and a cultural expression symptomatic of the period. Artaud recognizes the similarity between his and Nietzsche's views regarding the malaise of modern civilization. The cure that he suggests is also strikingly similar, namely, destruction that kills "God"—the deified values and concepts and institutions to which civilization is bound—in order to set free the inner forces of life. As Artaud writes: "I have said 'cruelty' as I would have said 'life.' " This insistence on liberation and spontaneity suggests connections with psycho-analysis, and particularly with Freud. Although admitting the influence, and particularly the close analogy between the Freudian concept of "nightmare" and his concept of "spectacle," Artaud specifies that in the theatre cruelty is conscious and deliberate, a studied and purposeful type of activity; theatre is "anarchy in the process of organizing itself." This element of deliberate and self-enhancing violence brings the Theatre of Cruelty close to Dadaism, a phenomenon that will be discussed in the next section. Finally, one can easily detect a certain connection between a "spectacle" and a "happening." As Artaud says, "In the Theatre of Cruelty, the audience is inside the spectacle"; and "the spectacle and the audience together become a *fête*" (feast, celebration, party). Whereas for Artaud a "happening" is spineless, a "spectacle" is a political act, a war of liberation.

IV

How important is violence in the fiction of the 20th century? Again, it is in itself by no means absent from prose narratives of earlier periods: much of what happens in Boccaccio's tales is violent, and so are the lurid events in Gothic novels.* Let us begin our survey in Sweden—and in the era of Strindberg—by considering Hjalmar Söderberg's *Doktor Glas* (1905), which is an outstanding work of fiction. Told in the first person, the story is about an elderly clergyman and his attractive young wife, who has fallen in love with another man. She goes for help to Dr Glas, who falls in love with her and decides to kill her husband. The crime is described in some detail and the whole story has something of the Gothic about it. The murder takes place in a public garden in Stockholm. As the two men sit side by side on a bench drinking Vichy water, Glas gives the clergyman a pill, supposedly to alleviate his heart condition; within seconds the victim's arms become limp, his head nods, and his eyes stare vacantly. But the murder turns out to have been futile, for Glas fails to win the widow. The interest here lies not only in the public nature of the murder but in the psychological exploration of the motives for it. Söderberg (1869–1941) belonged to the sceptical generation of the *fin de siècle*, and he shows himself here to be as interested in the nuances of mood and atmosphere as he is in the morality of murder.

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* See Vol. IV, "The Historical Novel."

One of the most famous and significant examples of violence in the modern novel is in André Gide's *Les caves du Vatican* (1914; The Vatican Cellars). A young rogue, Lafcadio, is alone in a compartment of a Rome–Naples train with the grotesque Amédé Flourissoire. On a sudden impulse, Lafcadio decides to push him off the speeding train. As Flourissoire tries desperately to save himself,

> Lafcadio felt a hideous claw come down on the back of his neck, lowered his head and gave a second push more impatient than the first; nails scraped his flesh; and Flourissoire could find nothing to cling to except the fur hat, which he clutched desperately and took with him in his fall.
>
> "Now for coolness," Lafcadio said to himself. "I mustn't bang the door; it might be heard in the next compartment."
>
> He pulled the door towards him, against the wind, with difficulty, then closed it softly.

There is, in a conventional sense, no motive for this murder. Gide once tried to pass the book off as a *sotie* (farce or parody), but he was in fact profoundly interested in Lafcadio's type of action. Like Dostoyevsky, whom he admired, he was fully aware that, regardless of the intensity of motivation or the degree of rationalization, the question that the criminal finally has to answer, or at least to ask, is "Dare I do it?" Indeed, in all action there is a gratuitous element, a new dimension of reality, that passes beyond reason and explanation (Gide's preface to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* [1824] has some interesting reflections on this "antinomian" problem). And, similarly, we might observe that, regardless of the conscious or unconscious intentions of its author, *Les caves du Vatican* became a highly symptomatic work of fiction. Its central theme, the motiveless crime—"gratuitous" is too positive a word—reverberates in wider and wider circles in the literature of the period. Apart from its obvious effect upon the Surrealists, the idea appears under a great variety of forms. As far as the novel is concerned, two authors seem to be particularly relevant, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. One hastens to add, however, that in both cases the question is one of confluence rather than of influence.

If Gide claims, perhaps rightly, that Lafcadio acts within an atmosphere of parody, Kafka (1883–1924) had no doubt whatever that his work, as well as his life, was "pure literature." When Milena, his fiancée, showed signs of impatience regarding his plans for the future, he wrote to her father: "I am nothing but literature." This is certainly true and demonstrates the uniqueness of the so-called Kafka phenomenon. On the other hand, it by no means makes his work less significant in the present context. His novel *Der Prozess* (The Trial; published posthumously in 1925) has certainly all the characteristics of a nightmare, a huge well-worked fresco on the subject of violence, cruelty, and horror. The hero, a bank employee designated only as Joseph K, is arrested without explanation, put through various stages of an indefinite trial, and finally taken by two men to a quarry at the edge of the town. There, one of the men tries to strangle him, as the other plunges a knife into his body, turning the blade several times, and Joseph K dies murmuring that he has been killed "like a dog." He does not know why he has been killed, and this leaves the reader with a feeling of senseless cruelty and cosmic threat.

On the other hand, Meursault, the main character in Camus's novel *L'étranger* (1942; The Outsider) does not know why he has killed. In the story he shoots an Arab on a bright beach, because it seems as if the Arab, who had earlier attacked one of his friends, was drawing a knife to stab him. But, dazed by the sun, Meursault has only a faint and confused image of the situation, and during his arrest and trial he becomes more and more disconnected from reality, more and more alienated, and finally incapable of feeling (as he had been—he keeps on remembering—at his mother's funeral). His lawyer does not even enter a plea for self-defence, making Meursault's crime seem *un acte gratuit*. One must stress that Meursault's is not an automatic, desensitized deed. At least once in the course of the story, he reveals the inner world of his feelings. This happens at the moment of the crime, when ". . . a fiery gust came from the sea while the sky cracked into two from end to end and a great sheet of flame poured down through the rift."

Despite its intensity, the violence in *Les caves du Vatican*, *L'étranger*, and *Der Prozess* is not invoked, described, or interpreted in a psychological sense. It is simply *there*, and, if it has any positive presence or significance, this is an existential one. The gestures of Lafcadio and Meursault have usually been regarded as absurd protest—absurd because it destroys its own aim—against the feeling of loneliness and meaninglessness dominating their existence. Even *Der Prozess* has been interpreted as having a positive meaning in a dialectical sense as a portrayal of violence and suffering (in capitalist society) that by the sheer "power of the negative" is bound to provoke a strong, and perhaps not less violent, reaction in the opposite direction.

Violence as a diffuse mental state, or as a specific gesture with symbolic meaning, occurs in many novels of the period. An outstanding example is Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924; The Magic Mountain), a philosophical novel that explores the modern fascination with death and the need to come to terms with it. A much discussed dream passage (in the chapter called "Snow") shows ritual cruelty at the centre of an apparently healthy society. The political implications of such Nietzschean pleasure in destruction are represented by Naphta; and they end in his suicide, which symbolizes the self-destructive tendency of his reaction against the old, humanistic image of man. The suicide of another character, Peeperkorn, also has symbolic meaning: the inevitable end in violence of his philosophy of vitality, once his vital powers flag.

A later German novelist, Günter Grass (b. 1927), creates a much tenser atmosphere of violence in his fantastic and symbolic novels *Die Blechtrommel* (1959; The Tin Drum), *Katz und Maus* (1961; Cat and Mouse), and *Hundejahre* (1963; Dog Years).* The atmosphere is similar to that of Kafka's novels, with one important difference. In Kafka, violence and terror occur in a dream-like climate, they are "pure literature"; but in Grass they are to a great extent manifestations of a political reality, the Nazi regime in Germany (which, needless to say, in no way explains or justifies them). A characteristically gratuitous act of violence occurs in *Hundejahre*, when a group of Nazi storm-troopers invade the house of a young Jew and knock out all his teeth. Violence is used as an outward expression of the age: it is Kafka's nightmare coming true.

Another contemporary novelist particularly concerned with violence is Alain Robbe-Grillet (b. 1922), the best-known representative of the *nouveau roman* in France. Unlike Grass, he gives the impression of using violence rather than being used by it. The scenes and climate of violence in his novels sometimes have an air of parody. They are "manufactured"

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* See Ch. 12, "German Literature and the Experience of Nazism."

(the word Robbe-Grillet himself uses) in the style of American Western or gangster movies.* His aim is to treat violence as a function of fate after the manner of Greek tragedy—as something that happens to us (as a thing) and that consequently determines our mode of being. *Les gommes* (1953; The Robbers) is, at one level, a straightforward story about an inexperienced provincial detective, Wallace, whose task is to discover a crime that may never have taken place. But this is not the level at which Robbe-Grillet's imagination takes wing. In his novels there are no characters, no plot, no goal-orientated human action in the traditional sense of those terms: there is nothing but things. Consequently the narrative from the very beginning is focussed on the formal relations between things, on their individual and collective location in space and time; to be specific, on the streets of a provincial town, with their dark corners, the café with its gossip, and the people coming and going. . . . All this absorbs Wallace deeper and deeper, faster and faster, until a crime is committed by Wallace himself: like a subatomic particle, he obeys the dynamics of the field.† Crime and violence are objective attributes of the situation in which Wallace finds himself. The point is even more forcibly made in Robbe-Grillet's second novel, *Le voyeur* (1955), the story of a small trader, Mathias, who in an effort to escape ruin returns to his tiny native island to sell wrist watches. While he is there, the body of a young girl is found in the sea. Who is the criminal? The answer of the narrative is a constellation of space-time factors: some cigarette ends, a piece of string, sweet wrappers, and a gap in the flow of time. At the end of his carefully planned and minutely described race around the island, Mathias cannot account for a certain interval of time and space. Consequently, in an act of self-discovery, he puts together the cigarette ends (which seem to be of the brand that he usually smokes), the piece of string (he used to have a similar one in his pocket), the wrappers. . . . The crime makes the criminal. Another of Robbe-Grillet's novels, *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959), shows—or rather *is*—a constellation of situations mirroring (or determining?) the last day of a soldier released from a defeated and disbanded army. The soldier, wearing someone else's uniform and identification number, has come to a town to deliver a small box, which he carries under his arm, to someone whose name and address he does not remember. He wanders through streets without names—empty identical streets with identical houses and doors—looking for an address he has forgotten. The only guidance and the only stimulus for his search—and for the narrative as a whole—is the sameness of the streets, doors, and windows, the morbid fascination of the lamp posts as night falls, a wandering child. . . . In this completely dehumanized world, he walks, or *is* walked, to complete exhaustion and death. The world is *there* but it does not hold any value or any goal for us; we are soldiers in a defeated and disbanding army. The image is even more terrifying than Joseph K's trial. The world of Robbe-Grillet's novels is cruel because of its majestic neutrality—he calls it "objectivity"—and indifference.

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* Robbe-Grillet has made films of his own; his *Le jeu avec le feu* (1974; Playing with Fire), for instance, parodies the vogue for sexual violence.

† See Ch. 21, "Literature and Science."

From this peak of sophisticated cruelty we can now descend for a while to the plains of straightforward violence. Two broad categories of fictional narrative stand out in this respect, one dealing with war and concentration camps, the other with race conflicts. Here the subject itself is violent, and therefore fictional works dealing with it are less symptomatic in a cultural or psychological sense. More interesting from our point of view is the work of novelists such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck—all members of what has been called the "tough-guy" school.

Violence in Hemingway's novels is generally associated with such activities as hunting, bull-fighting, and war, and often involves an atmosphere of male assertiveness and the necessity of proving something to oneself. But in his most characteristic treatments of violence Hemingway (1898–1961) is concerned to give it meaning by ritualizing it, which explains his special interest in the bull-fight. In a world from which all conventional values seemed to have disappeared, Hemingway imposed value on what he often called the *nada* (the nothingness of existence) by the acting out of a secret code on the part of strong silent men; and ritualized violence is sometimes part of that code. War is presented as evil in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) not so much because it is violent as because it is chaotic; order is imposed on experience by the love of the hero (who deserts from war) and the heroine, but is replaced by chaos again when the heroine dies in childbirth. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), Hemingway's novel of the Spanish Civil War, the hero achieves the dual end of testing himself both in the violence of war and in the demands of love, thus creating a world of private value, which expires with his own death. In *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), an old Cuban fisherman's heroic fight against an enormous fish is presented as a highly ritualized pattern of action in which it is the ritual that endows the otherwise useless action with value; the unritualized violence of the destruction of a merlin by sharks, on the other hand, does not confer value. For Hemingway, violence could be the destructive, chaotic, meaningless violence of war and sometimes of nature;

or it could provide an environment in which values such as human dignity or courage or simple endurance could be asserted; or it could provide the testing ground of the individual's masculinity, or, if properly ritualized, give meaning to the otherwise meaningless cruelty of life.

Although he cannot be described as a philosopher of violence, Faulkner (1897–1962) wrote vividly and extensively of violence as part of life in the American South, the setting of most of his novels. In *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) the main character, Jason Compson, is motivated by continuous rage, which reaches its culmination in the last episode of the story, when he leaps into the surrey, knocking the Negro driver out of the way, whipping the horse, and striking the idiot Benjy. Most, if not all, of Faulkner's novels rock with violence: with violent people, violent society, and violent nature. *Sanctuary* (1931)—which, he once admitted, he wrote with the intention of making money—contains one of the most outstanding acts of violence in modern literature: the rape of Temple Drake in the corncrib.

Despite his genuine concern with the tense and violent social atmosphere of the South, Faulkner often wrote in a comic vein. The opposite is true about most of the work of Steinbeck (1902–68), which is sometimes politically over-defined and melodramatically serious. *In Dubious Battle* (1936), a novel inspired by the strikes that occurred during the American Depression of the 1930s, is full of mob violence and death, but also of enthusiasm for the communists, whose movement Steinbeck extensively supported for several years. His other Depression novel about the wandering Okies, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), is much better known and, on the whole, of higher literary value. Steinbeck's preoccupation with violence is even more ostensibly and crudely demonstrated in *Of Mice and Men* (1937), the sordid story of a well-meaning but murderous rural simpleton.

Steinbeck's novels, and particularly the first one, pose bluntly the problem of political, or rather politically determined, violence. This important theme in 20th-century literature was given powerful focus in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), a remarkable work of fiction portraying in minute detail the atmosphere of suspicion, sadistic cruelty, and terror during the period of the Great Purge in Soviet Russia. More recently, the theme of communist violence has been treated by Petru Dumitriu, a Rumanian writer in exile, in his novel *Incognito*, published in English in 1964.

Last but not least, one should mention Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1957), a tragedy in an epic style, inspired by the great turmoil created by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed it. Yuri Zhivago may be considered a truly tragic hero because he is in stature as great as the disasters that he endures. He is a man of great talents and lofty ideals. The violence of Russia's "terrible years" breaks up his life, his love, his creative powers. As a person he is defeated (as tragic heroes always are). But the book is not one of defeat: Pasternak's vision is sustained by his sense of the greatness of what is occurring. For him beauty, like seed, will always break forth again from the cruel confining earth. He redeems violence by making it appear a necessary part of the process of life and of history.*

V

The literature of the period abounds with manifestos, doctrines, and statements of *ars poetica* that maintain in one way or another that violence is a stimulant for poetic creation and even an aesthetic phenomenon in itself. For that reason this section will be primarily concerned with those trends in 20th-century poetry in which violence has a programmatic character and inspirational value for the literary and social activities of the poet—in short, with the poetry of Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism. But, as most of these trends develop during and within the atmosphere created by World War I, it will be useful to start by a brief discussion of some aspects of the war poetry of the period.

One of the earliest examples of war poetry in this period—but to a certain extent an atypical one—is Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* (The Lay of Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke), a prose poem written in 1899 and published in 1906. It is atypical because the poem is about the Austrian-Turkish wars of the 17th century and because it presents a highly romanticized war image: a young standard-bearer who dies heroically after a night of love. Before 1912 the poem attracted little attention, but during World War I it became not only the best-known poem in Germany but a best-seller (almost 200,000 copies were sold by 1919). It can be argued that its appeal was escapist, but the escape was into a part mystical, part psycho-analytical conception of sex, death, and heroism. Rilke's fascination with the dark depths of experience, which he believed modern society and modern thinking generally try to keep out of sight, but without which there can be no art, led him to greet the outbreak of war with *Fünf Gesänge* (Five Songs) of praise:

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* The question of Russian attitudes to the violence of the revolution is discussed at greater length in Ch. 13, "Russian Literature in the Twentieth Century."

> Endlich ein Gott.
> Ist er ein Wissender? *Kann*
> er ein Wissender sein, dieser reissende Gott?
> Da er doch alles Gewusste zerstört. Das lange, das liebreiche,
> unser vertraulich Gewusstes. Nun liegen die Häuser
> nur noch wie Trümmer umher seines Tempels.
>
> (A god at last. Is he a knowing god? *Can* he be knowing, this god of violent action? For he has destroyed all that was known. All that we had known for so long, lovingly, intimately. Now our houses lie like mere ruins about his temple.)

Rilke's enthusiasm did not long survive. To believe, in the first shock of fighting, that "A terrible beauty is born," as Yeats did with regard to the Easter Rising (1916) in Dublin, was not uncommon among even the greatest poets. The old, cherished certainties of European civilization had become so uninspiring to the poetic imagination that it was hard (at first) not to welcome or respect the power that could destroy them. Perhaps no poem so effectively captures this mood of "escape" into the liberating experience of war as Yeats's "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death":

> Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
> Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove to this tumult in the clouds. . . .

"Tumult" must have sounded like a grotesque euphemism, however, to those who had undergone the experience of Flanders (Yeats's attention was fixed, of course, not on Flanders but on Ireland). The true violence of the period is envisaged rather in his more mythological poems—"The Second Coming," for instance, or "Leda and the Swan." Here violence is rough, real, bestial, but entirely symbolic: a vision of the way meaning breaks in upon the world, some great meaningful event pregnant with the inspiration of future art and religion. The question that confronted the entire generation of war poets was whether, at close range, the increasingly cataclysmic events could be seen to have any spiritual significance whatever, or whether they simply invalidated the rhetoric of poetry and belief altogether. This question can be seen working itself out in the changing styles and poetic experiments of English war poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Isaac Rosenberg. Since their deepest need was to demonstrate how senseless the slaughter was, they were unable to create, by traditional standards, any very significant body of verse.

Patriotism and the glorification of war were also expressed, most often in the work of minor poets and, in most cases, at an early stage of the war. A typical example is Ernest Lissauer's *Hassgesang gegen England* (1914; Hymn of Hate Against England), a poem very popular in Germany and distributed among the German troops. Ironically, Lissauer was a Jew who later became a refugee from Nazi Germany. In the same category is J. de Marthold's *Chant de haine, réponse à Berlin* (1915; Song of Hate), a reply to Lissauer's poem. Some French patriotic poetry is undoubtedly superior to this; but it is noteworthy that (say) Charles Péguy's *Ève*—a long poem that may be regarded as the French Catholic counterpart to Rilke's more Germanic, Nietzschean hymns—was written in 1913 and is so generally mystical in tone that very little sense of violence is communicated:

Heureux ceux qui sont morts, car ils sont retournés
Dans ce premier terreau nourri de leur dépouille,
Dans ce premier caveau, dans la tourbe et la houille.
Heureux les grands vaincus, les rois désabusés.

Heureux les grands vainqueurs. Paix aux hommes de guerre.
Qu'ils soient ensevelis dans un dernier silence.
Que Dieu mette avec eux dans la juste balance
Un peu de ce terreau d'ordure et ce poussière.

Que Dieu mette avec eux dans le juste plateau
Ce qu'ils ont tant aimé, quelques grammes de terre,
Un peu de cette vigne, un peu de côteau,
Un peu de ce ravin sauvage et solitaire.

Mère, voici vos fils, qui sont tant battus.
Vous les voyez couchés parmi les nations.
Que Dieu ménage un peu ces êtres débattus,
Ces cœurs pleins de tristesse et d'hésitations.

(Happy are the dead, for they have returned to this first mould fed with their remains, to this first vault, into the turf and the coal. Happy are the great defeated ones, the kings without illusions. / Happy are the great conquerors. Peace to the men of war. May they be buried in a last silence. May God place with them in the balance, on the side of good, a little of this compost of leaves and dust. / May God place with them in the scale of good the thing they have loved, a few grammes of earth, a piece of this vine, a little of this hillside, a little of this wild and lonely ravine. / Mother, here are your sons, who have been beaten so much. You see them laid to rest amid the nations. May God treat them a bit more kindly now, these men of contention, these hearts full of sadness and hesitations.)

Echoes of Péguy's poem can be found in the war verse of other French poets—in, for instance, Paul Claudel's *Trois poèmes de guerre* (1915), and, more elegiacally and with less heroics, in Charles Vildrac's *Chants du désespéré* (1924) and the work of Jean Marc Bertrand (who, like Péguy, was killed in action). One of Bertrand's best-known poems, "De profundis," was written in 1916:

> De plus profond de la tranchée,
> Nous élevons les mains vers vous,
> Seigneur! ayez pitié de nous
> Et de notre âme désséchée! . . .
>
> Éclairez-nous dans ce marasme,
> Réconfortez-nous et chassez
> L'angoisse des cœurs harassés;
> Ah! Rendez-nous l'enthousiasme!
>
> Mais aux Morts, qui tous ont été
> Couchés dans la glaise et le sable,
> Donnez le repos ineffable,
> Seigneur! ils l'ont bien mérité.
>
> (From the very depths of the trench we raise our hands to you, Lord! Have mercy on us and pity our withered soul! . . . / Let your light shine upon us in this soulless place, comfort us and drive out the anguish from our harassed hearts; ah! restore our enthusiasm! / But to the dead, who have all been laid in the clay and the sand, give thine ineffable rest, Lord! They have well deserved it.)

For all its anguish and desperation, "De profundis" is not really an antiwar poem. A more vigorous expression of such an attitude can be found in Bertolt Brecht's "Legende vom toten Soldaten" (Legend of the Dead Soldiers), which was first published as an epilogue to his second play, *Trommeln in der Nacht* (1922; Drums in the Night), and deserves to be quoted at length:

> Sie schütteten ihm einen feurigen Schnaps
> In den verwesten Leib,
> Und hängten zwei Schwestern in seinen Arm
> Und sein halb entblösstes Weib.
>
> Und weil der Soldat nach Verwesung stinkt,
> Drum hinkt ein Pfaffe voran,
> Der über ihn ein Weihrauchfass schwingt,
> Dass er nicht stinken kann. . . .

> Die Sterne sind nicht immer da.
> Es kommt ein Morgenrot.
> Doch der Soldat, so wie er's gelernt,
> Zieht in den Heldentod.

> (They poured some fiery liquor into his rotten carcass, and hung two nurses on his arm and his half-naked girl. / And because the soldier stinks of rot, a priest limps on in front to swing some incense over him, so that he cannot stink. . . . / The stars are not always up there. Now comes the dawn. But the soldier, as he has been instructed, is off to a hero's death.)

These examples must suffice to illustrate the various types of poetic expression to which modern war has given rise. In addition, we should notice that World War I, or more generally the period after 1910, produced a poetic experience of its own, a new poetic "event," as it has sometimes been called. Its beginnings can be traced to the work of Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), a writer of notable versatility and originality, who in 1916 received a shrapnel wound in the head from which he never fully recovered, and who died in the 1918 influenza epidemic on the day before the Armistice. Apollinaire was a tireless experimenter, a passionate seeker after novelty, whose creed was that "one can be a poet in every domain; all you need is an eye for discovery." "Surprise" and "intensity" were for him essential components of poetic experience. No wonder the outbreak of war aroused in him "an irresponsible excited amusement," as one of his commentators puts it.[5] The following lines are characteristic of the way in which he poeticized the memories of his dead comrades:

> Vous voilà de nouveau près de moi
> Souvenirs de mes compagnons morts à la guerre. . . .
> Ombre multiple que le soleil vous garde
> Vous qui m'aimez assez pour ne jamais me quitter
> Et qui dansez au soleil sans faire de poussière
> Ombre encre du soleil
> Écriture de ma lumière
> Caissons de regrets
> Un dieu qui s'humilie.

> (There you are again near to me, memories of my companions who have died in the war. . . . Multiple shade, may the sun preserve you, you who love me enough never to leave me and who dance in the sun without making any dust, ink shade of the sun, writing of my light, big boxes of regrets, a god who humbles himself.)

In one of his notable *calligrammes* (word-pictures) Apollinaire gives the impression that for him the war is a gigantic game, an immense fresco especially created for the poet:

> Le ciel est étoilé par les obus des Boches
> La forêt merveilleuse où je vis donne un bal. . . .
>
> (The sky is starred by the Boche shells, the marvellous forest where
> I live is giving a ball. . . .)

This "poetic transmutation," as André Breton called it, was not an isolated accident, but expressed a feeling shared by many artists and writers of the period. Art, they felt, should become a form of protest, a "war" in itself. Briefly, the underlying tendency was to capture and express in art form all the aggressive and destructive forces released by the war. Dadaism, or simply Dada, was one of the first and purest expressions of this spirit.

"Dada" is a meaningless word that, according to one story, was uttered for the first time at 6 p.m. on 8 February, 1916, by Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), a poet of Rumanian origin; it summed up a new attitude to art that had developed among a small group of friends, including originally Hans Arp and Hugo Ball. In the same year, when Tzara moved from Zurich to Paris, Dada became a sort of movement and a rallying point for *avant-garde* artists and writers such as André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Picabia, Antonin Artaud, Marcel Duchamp, and Pablo Picasso. It is difficult to define briefly the common objectives of such a heterogeneous group of people, who were animated in their behaviour in all spheres of life, private or public, mainly by the anarcho-utopian principle "destroy to save." In his seven manifestos, Tzara declared total war on civilization, i.e. on law, morality, and religion, on tradition and reason alike, on the past and the future, or, to use an expression fashionable today, on the "system." Dada was inspired by a complete contempt for the establishment (*la communauté*) and by a desire to be totally independent of it; its sole and supreme purpose was to "sweep clean" and if necessary to "massacre" all the great achievements and values of the past, to leave nothing but a faint "hope of a purified humanity." Tzara gave expression to this apocalyptic vision in one of his most characteristic poems, "L'homme approximatif," which contains the following "schizoid" vision of flight from reality and death:

> qu'importe l'ami le seul la nuit l'ennui
> je porte en moi la mie de pain la mort l'ami
> et le degré de froid chaque jour augmente en moi ami
> devient ami qu'importe l'habitude

> qu'importe l'ami le seul la nuit l'ennui
> un jour un jour un jour je mettrai le manteau de l'éternelle chair
> sur moi
> enfoui oublié des autres à leur tour oubliés des autres
> si je pouvais atteindre le lumineux oubli. . . .
>
> (Why care about friend only friend the night *ennui* I have in myself the crumb of life my death my friend and every day the degree of cold increases in me a friend becomes a friend why care about habit why care about friend only friend the night *ennui* one day one day one day I shall put on the cloak of eternal flesh buried away from the others in their turn forgotten by others if I could attain radiant oblivion. . . .)

Even more characteristic of the dadaist mood is Tzara's "Monsieur Aa l'antiphilosophe," which is quoted in full:

> Capitaine!
> les bolides, les forces ouvertes de la cascade nous menacent;
> le nœud des serpents, le fouet de chaînes avancent triomphalement
> dans les pays contaminés de fureur perpétuelle;
>
> Capitaine!
> toutes les accusations des animaux maltraités, en morsures
> au-dessus du lit, bâillent en rosaces de sang, la pluie des dents
> de pierre et les taches d'excrément dans les cages nous ense-
> velissent en manteaux interminables comme la neige;
>
> Capitaine!
> les clartés du charbon devenant phoque, foudre, insecte sous
> tes yeux, les escadrons d'hallucinés, les monstres à roue, les
> cris des somnambules mécaniques, les estomacs liquides sur
> des tablettes d'argent, les cruautés des fleurs carnivores enva-
> hiront la journée simple et rurale et la cinema de ton sommeil;
>
> Capitaine!
> prends garde aux yeux bleus.
>
> (Captain! the meteors, the freed force of the waterfall threaten us; the knot of serpents, the whip of chains advance triumphally in the contaminated lands of perpetual fury; / Captain! all the accusations of animals maltreated in bites on top of the bed, gape in blood-red rose windows, the rain of stone teeth and stains of excrement in the cages bury us in endless coats like snow; / Captain! the gleams of the coal becoming seal, lightning, insect before your eyes, the squadrons of hallucinated men, the wheeled monsters, the cries of mechanized sleepwalkers, the liquid stomachs on silver trays, the cruelties of carnivorous flowers will invade the simple rural day and the cinema of your sleep; / Captain! beware of blue eyes.)

Characteristic of this explosion of disordered imagination, this "anti-philosophy," is the violence implicit in its protest against conventional sense. Something similar is to be found in Richard Huelsenbeck's "End of the World," which concludes as follows:

> I hold peace and war in my toga but I'll take a cherry flip
> Today nobody knows whether he was tomorrow
> They beat time with a coffin lid
> If only somebody had the nerve to rip the tail feathers
> out of the trolley car it's a great age
> The professors of zoology gather in the meadows
> With the palms of their hands they turn back the rainbows
> the great magician sets the tomatoes on his forehead
> Again thou hauntest castle and grounds
> The roebuck whistles the stallion bounds
> (And this is how the world is this is all that's ahead of us)[6]

The Dadaists exploded upon the public scene in 1916 at the Café Voltaire in Zurich, where they produced a "spectacle" dedicated to Negro music, accompanied by poems written by Tzara, Huelsenbeck, and Janco, before an audience composed mainly of Futurists, Cubists, and other *avant-garde* artists. The poetry was "dynamic"—an attempt to give direct expression to the movements of the unconscious mind; the emphasis was on intensity and spontaneity, on acting, rather than on style and composition. The ultimate aim of such spectacles was not simply to reject but to undo (*défaire*) and kill conventionality in art, in thought and feeling: "Words should be replaced by screams, phrases by gestures, pastiche by parody, and literature (writing) by stage." A dramatic or, rather, theatrical style was deliberately used to shock, scandalize, and enrage the audience. Even a Dada poem was a "show" in the style of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. As one critic put it, "Dada resurrects a state of war in time of peace; Dada is the German of World War I who reverts to barbarity in order to defend civilization."[7]

Whether Surrealism is as violent as Dadaism is a question that cannot be answered either simply or briefly. Two main ideas, or rather recurrent ideological motifs, characterize the surrealist conception of art. One derives from psycho-analysis, and from Freudian psycho-analysis in particular, the other from Marxism. Thus, in his first surrealist manifesto André Breton agrees with the Dada principle that poetry is in essence "activity of the mind," but, at the same time, he makes the point that it is also "expression." Naturally this should not be understood in a traditionalist sense; poetry is "expression" only to the extent to which this does not alter the spontaneous "activity" of the unconscious mind, only to the extent to which it is "pure psychic automatism that is intended to convey, either verbally, or in writing, or in some other manner, the real functioning of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason and apart from any aesthetic or moral consideration." The Surrealists were the first to recommend and to practise automatic writing; needless to say, they did this not for its own sake or for aesthetic purposes in general. Their main aim was to create and maintain a state of mind of total availability and permanent freedom from any social, cultural, or moral restraint. In this sense, Surrealism was a psychic revolution.

As to the second guiding principle, it may be said that most Surrealists agreed with the basic tenets of historical materialism and cooperated with left-wing groups, although few of them were willing to follow the Communist Party line in France or elsewhere. In their many, varied manifestos they declared: "We are the rebellion of the spirit . . . we are no doubt Barbarians because we are disgusted with a certain type of civilization . . . the Russian Revolution is the Surrealist revolution." They sympathized with Trotsky and had angry, hallucinatory visions in politics as well as in art, as the following "Notes sur la poésie" (signed by André Breton and Paul Éluard) demonstrate:

> A poem must be a *débâcle* of the intellect. It cannot be anything else. *Débâcle*: a collapse, a panic flight, but solemn, but probing; an image of what one ought to be, of the state in which deliberate efforts no longer count for anything.
>
> Dans le poète
> l'oreille rit,
> la bouche jure;
> C'est l'intelligence, l'éveil qui tue;
> C'est le sommeil qui rêve et voit clair;
> C'est l'image et le phantasme qui ferment les yeux;
> C'est le manque et la lacune qui sont crées.
>
> La poésie est le contraire de la littérature. . . .
> La poésie est une pipe.
> Le lyrisme est le développement d'une protestation.
>
> (In the poet the ear laughs, the mouth swears; it is intelligence, wakefulness that kills; it is sleep that dreams and sees clearly; it is the image and the phantasm that close men's eyes; it is needs and blanks that are created. / Poetry is the opposite of literature. . . . Poetry is a pipe. Lyricism is the development of a protest.)

The most remarkable aspect of this movement is that the Surrealists believed themselves to be "pacifists." They certainly hated war as they hated many other things. In this respect they marked the beginning of a literary sensibility in modern society that is violent in the name of peace. Similar attitudes to violence are characteristic of other literary trends and schools of the period, notably of German expressionist poetry, of futurist poetry, and more recently, of Beat poetry.

Thus, for the German Expressionist Gottfried Benn, the poet is or should be a Superman, a Titan who uses the power of the word to destroy the conventional world of his society; he annihilates common reality by an act of transcendence into the pure and autonomous world of expression (*Ausdruckswelt*—the German language seems to make such concepts more plausible). Intensity, violence, and above all the power of negation are the main attributes of his gift. In terms of common reality, the poet is and ought to be both asocial and amoral. Significantly enough, Benn called his first book of verse *Morgue* (1912), and in one of its poems, "Schöne Jugend" (Beautiful Youth), he describes the corpse of a dead girl, lying in a field, with rats eating their way through her flesh.

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), the futurist-proletarian poet of the Russian Revolution of 1917, claimed that he discovered his talent while reading the works of Karl Marx, and the *Programme of Ehrfurt* in particular. If true, this explains the unusual violence of his verse. He had both a natural inclination and a cultivated taste for sharp, bold, even crude, imagery and language. For a full understanding of these aspects of his poetry one should compare Mayakovsky not only with the Futurists, but also with some of his contemporary Russian poets, notably Sergei Yesenin (1895–1925). Yesenin, a peasant poet and on the whole a more vigorous talent than Mayakovsky, also distinguished himself by the unusual freshness, directness, and violence of his imagery. Yesenin was a great original and a rebel, but not a revolutionary in a political sense; he saw himself as the last poet of the village. Mayakovsky, by contrast, was a poet of the town, of industry and factories; he tried very hard, but not entirely successfully, to harness his exalted imagination and rebellious personality to the ideals of the revolution and the programmes of the party. Mayakovsky wanted to make his reader feel the "social imperative" of his verse, as the following fragments illustrate:

> I want the pen to equal the bayonet. . . .
>
> I know the power of the words, the power of the words—tocsin. . . .
>
> Comrades
> Give us a new art
> An art which shoots
> From the guns of the Republic.

Mayakovsky and Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944), the founder of the Futurist movement, met for the first time in 1925, in Paris. "We did not have anything to say to each other," Mayakovsky remarked. "I was a Bolshevik, he was a fascist." The remark reflects the history and meaning of political violence in 20th-century poetry. Mayakovsky rationalized, or rather, over-rationalized, violence in political ideology and revolutionary doctrine, whereas Marinetti accepted it in its naked irrational form as a value in itself. Here are the main points of Marinetti's futurist manifesto, which may serve as a closing comment on violence in 20th-century poetry:

> We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.
>
> The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity, and revolt.
>
> Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap, and the blow with the fist.
>
> We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile . . . is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. . . .
>
> Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. . . .
>
> We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind. . . . We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed.
>
> We want to glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists . . . and contempt for woman.
>
> We want to demolish museums, libraries, fight morality, feminism, and all opportunism and utilitarian cowardice.
>
> We shall sing of great crowds agitated by work, pleasure, and revolt; the multicoloured and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons: the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; . . . and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.

VI

Three main attitudes to violence seem to emerge in the literature of the period. The first is realistic representation and a pretence at objectivity. In fact, this is rarely achieved. Even in such works as Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1934), Henri Barbusse's *Le feu* (1916; Under Fire), or Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts neues* (1929; All Quiet on the Western Front), an element of propaganda is generally noticeable. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for a 20th-century writer to look upon the world with the calm comprehensive gaze of the epic poet who accepts violence as merely one aspect of human existence. The tendency of modern literature has been to *impress* and *express*, rather than merely to represent. The difference may be seen by comparing the manner in which violence is represented in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863–9) and in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

The second main attitude is some kind of approval, which greets violence as a way out of apathy (as in absurdist or existentialist drama), or as an act of positive self-assertion (as in much expressionist and futurist writing), or as a historical necessity (as in the revolutionary poetry of Mayakovsky). And finally, there is a third attitude, of ambivalent feeling toward violence, which is present sometimes in the first two, and which is more generally characteristic of 20th-century literature. The first signs of it appeared more than half a century ago and were closely related to what was described earlier as a new type of literary sensibility: a tense combination of aggressive and destructive impulses on one side, with lofty ideals and eschatological visions of peace on the other.

At the heart of this third attitude there is often a serious incapacity to define the social significance of violence. This may mean that we cannot really distinguish very clearly the poetry and style of life of a Marinetti from those of an Aragon or a Mayakovsky, even though they belonged to opposite political camps. More remarkable still is the example of Gide's Lafcadio, for whom violence meant both everything and nothing (*un acte gratuit*) at the same time. Gide seems to feel that were his hero to assert his true nature, his authentic self, this would destroy him and society: life, when conceived in such terms, means death—a paradox he tries to escape by denial and diffuse symbolization.

Is the most distinctive literary phenomenon of the time, then, the man who asserts himself by negation? When Breton reacted against Tzara's iconoclasm to search for a more positive meaning in violence, he could hardly go beyond the dadaist paradox: "destroy to save." The profound negative component in modern art has been analysed with great skill by Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus* (1947), where the aim of the hero (a composer) is to "take back" the humanistic message of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. We are reminded of Gide's desire to *défaire* and of the *cliché* definition that haunts all literary histories of the modern period with their catalogues of anti-heroes, anti-novels, anti-arts.

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CHAPTER 4

Absurd Art, Absurd Man, Absurd Heroes

David Galloway*

The Private Gesture

In one of the most memorable scenes of his perverse autobiography, *Journal du voleur* (1948; Thief's Journal), Jean Genet recalls how he once came upon Stilitano, the idol of his youth, trapped in a Palace of Mirrors. In contrast to his usual cruel self-sufficiency, the Serbian pimp is reduced to cringing humiliation by his inability to make his way out of the labyrinth, and an amused crowd watches his defeat:

> Drawing near the booth, the only one of its kind at the fair, the crowd of people watching it was so great that I knew something exceptional was going on. The people were laughing . . . . Before having seen him I knew that Stilitano, and he alone, was trapped, *visibly* lost, in the corridors of glass. No one could hear him, but by his gestures, by his mouth, one could tell that he was screaming with anger. He looked at the crowd in a rage, and they looked at him laughing. The manager of the booth was indifferent. Situations of that kind are quite common. Stilitano was alone. Everybody had found a way out except him. The universe became strangely overcast. The shadow which suddenly covered things and people was the shadow of my solitude in the face of this despair, for no longer able to yell, to bump against the glass, resigned to being the laughing-stock of the idlers, Stilitano crouched on the floor, thus indicating that he refused to go on.[1]

The image of the Palace of Mirrors is a powerfully provocative metaphor for the plight of man in absurd literature. Here surrealistic method and philosophical implication have an organic unity that similar images of man's alienation in other works of absurd literature do not commonly possess. Genet makes it clear, as well, that what we have is merely the momentary *visible* representation of a state that, in his own work, is virtually constant.

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* Ordinarius Professor for American Studies, Ruhr University, Bochum.

Furthermore, in its contrast of the enraged victim and the pitiless crowd, Genet's image raises the larger problem of the social and sociological implications of absurd literature. Genet's own vision is uncompromisingly, often ruthlessly, inner-directed, and the crisis through which Stilitano (and hence the narrator) passes has no significant social dimension. Whatever god or bureaucrat or technician oversees the labyrinth in which modern man is trapped is as indifferent as the crowd to the suffering of the individual: nor can either the manager of the booth or the crowd itself be said in any sense to have prompted Stilitano's crisis. He enters the labyrinth, we must presume, of his own choice, he is trapped there by his own confusion, and he succumbs to his own rage: in its origins, then, his plight is fundamentally different from that of the traditional hero, provoked by society to enter the labyrinth of cultural or economic or religious values. Stilitano's thievery and drug-peddling represent a rejection of society; the role of the criminal as "social critic" is discussed under "Albert Camus and the Absurd Hero" below. But in this fundamental metaphor of modern man's isolation we are not concerned with social "causes": hence, Stilitano stands at the opposite pole from Joseph Andrews, Jude Fawley, Julien Sorel, or Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths.

Once Stilitano's isolation becomes visible, however, one might expect the author to take issue with the insensitive crowd; interestingly, only two possibilities occur to him—to walk away, or to break into the maze—and the response is characteristic of one extreme form of absurd literature. Stilitano is finally rescued by a friend: so, Genet seems to say, suffering is private, and salvation, where it comes at all, is also private and subjective; nor does he imply (although the reader, conditioned by the values of traditional literature, may infer) that the values of the crowd or of the indifferent manager should be altered.

Genet and Samuel Beckett represent the most inward and private manifestations of absurd literature; in this respect, their greatest predecessor is Franz Kafka. Such writers as Albert Camus and Eugène Ionesco, no less absorbed by man's "absurd" plight, are nonetheless more concerned with the degree to which society is "at fault." But whatever powerful images Camus and Ionesco give us for the atomization of modern society, they, too, place the greatest stress on the role of individual consciousness and individual responsibility, and where they promise the regeneration of social forms and forces they base their hope on the regeneration of the individual self. The resultant indifference (or what often appears as indifference) to particular social issues and effects is one of the many aspects of absurd art to suggest that the critical language with which we speak of such literature—a critical language in great measure formed by the social and aesthetic values of the 19th century—is peculiarly outmoded. The literature of the absurd has much to tell us about the age in which it was written, but it asks first to be taken on its own terms.

Absurd art attempts to shock us into an awareness of the state of the world, the mockery of reality, the disintegration of the self, and the omnipresence of death; it pictures man lost in a maelstrom of incomprehensible forces and often deprived of even the most rudimentary forms of human communication. When the uniqueness and independence of the self, conventional concepts of reality, and the very power of communication are rejected as illusory, it might seem to follow that the artist himself would abandon those forms of communication that we conventionally designate as "play," "novel," or "poem." That he does not do so is evidence of a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the absurd; while wishing to impress us with the irrefragable chaos of things, the writer clearly does not wish to accept the chaos. The ultimate absurdist play takes place on an empty stage before an absent audience; the ultimate absurdist novel is made up of blank pages. That the artist is unwilling to abnegate his role so completely is a sign that he has not lost all faith in the power of communication: in *Les chaises* (1952; The Chairs) Eugène Ionesco's deaf-and-dumb orator "addresses" a non-existent audience; Ionesco does not. The art of the absurd, however, repeatedly tests conventional forms and finds them wanting; any history of contemporary literature would in significant part be a history of the search for new forms and new language,* for words themselves, as symbols of an outmoded reality, are often seen to be inadequate. Hence, absurd art is experimental and innovatory by nature; it is also often "preposterous" in form because it seeks to ridicule bourgeois standards, including bourgeois aesthetic conventions. The absurd inversion may take an almost burlesque form, as it does in Ionesco's *La jeune fille à marier* (1953; Maid to Marry), in which a proud mother discusses the brilliance of her eminently marriageable young daughter, who then appears on stage as "a man, about 30 years old, robust and virile, with a bushy black moustache, and wearing a grey suit."[2] When anything can be said to "happen" in absurd art, it does so in defiance of rational expectations; even more characteristically, it presents us with a world in which nothing does happen—an image of the endless, apparently unredeemable purgatory in which man spins out his meaningless existence.

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* In the modern period, painting and sculpture have sought such a language as well—most notably through abstractionism; the 12-tone scale and electronic music represent the most obviously successful attempts to find an unclichéd form of musical expression; and the cinema has appealed to artists in all fields as a "new" form of international expression, a kind of cultural Esperanto. Since the time of Apollinaire (1880–1918) cultural movements have tended to cut across disciplines, but never has there been such continuous cross-fertilization as there is in the present day. Both the novel of the absurd and the theatre of the absurd owe a debt to cinematic technique. Chaplin's little tramp may have greater claim than any other character to being considered the 20th-century Everyman—a "little" man and a victim, but one who repeatedly defies the laws of gravity and of social convention in "absurd" battles with dogs, dowagers, and machinery. The bowler hat routine in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a tribute to Chaplin, just as Beckett's *Film* (1965) is a tribute to Buster Keaton. In *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1962) Martin Esslin discusses the general debt that absurdist drama owes to the silent film. Many dramatists of

Fashions and Symptoms

Unhappily, "absurd" has become the critical *bon mot* of the decades following World War II; that it is also the *mot juste* seems doubtful when we consider the liberality with which it is applied. Philosophers, philosopher-novelists, and playwrights have attempted to restore some precision to the term, but with few exceptions the critic,* like the layman, seems content to make of it a portmanteau label for that which is illogical, preposterous, irrational, "mad," ridiculous, senseless, militantly *avant-garde*, and (without distinction) apparently or absolutely incomprehensible. However misleading such catholic application of the term may inevitably be, it nonetheless signals the fact that something radically new (in degree, if not in kind) is taking place in the arts; no doubt, as well, by the very frequency of its recurrence the term reassures us through that process of verbal illusion whereby the word-as-symbol converts the dissimilar to the similar. But the similarities are not all illusory, for we rightly sense that behind certain isolated cultural phenomena there is a link more real than their *apparent* preposterousness, even though this is the quality that first impresses us in a piano "composition" that consists of almost five minutes of absolute silence; in a film that compels us to contemplate the severe granite shaft of New York's Empire State Building; in a novel whose

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the absurd, such as Beckett, Pinter, and Genet, have written for the cinema as well as for the stage, and one of the leading practitioners of the *nouveau roman*, Alain Robbe-Grillet, first gained wide public recognition for the film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961); his novels, like those of many of his French contemporaries, show close affinities with the most *avant-garde* cinematic techniques. In such a climate it is not surprising to learn that Günter Grass and Robert Pinget began their careers as painters or that *nouveau romancier* Michel Butor has collaborated with the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. The so-called "happening" is a further instance of this intermingling of the contemporary arts.

* The most noteworthy study of absurd literature is Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*. My debt to Mr Esslin's study is considerable.

pages we may shuffle and read at random; in white-on-white paintings and self-destroying sculptures. It would seem, at moments, as though a severe seismic shock had run through Western culture, strewing the landscape with strange, often grotesque, debris and opening fissures in surfaces that once seemed firm and predictable.

In some measure the resultant bewilderment is created gratuitously, as part of an *avant-garde* fashion that demands continuous replenishment; the self-exploiting, self-exhausting tradition of the new has come, in recent years, to place a premium on the outrageous, and yesterday's experimental play or painting quickly becomes today's "classic."* Never before have artists been encouraged to experiment so freely, or so generously rewarded for improvisation, but one possible concomitant to this liberation is, of course, the diluting and obscuring of critical standards. If under the heading of "absurdity" we indiscriminately group those works that merely exploit preposterous fashions with those that are shaped by some less transitory cultural or aesthetic motive, we deprive the term of a great deal of its utility. Bad works of art, cultural fashions, and pretensions can tell us a great deal about society (often, indeed, more than works of so-called serious intent), and certain fashionable absurdities can alert us as surely as the most carefully constructed play by Beckett or Ionesco to a quality of nervousness and anxiety in contemporary society. Every cultural movement produces imitators and hangers-on, and often they have justified their activities by serving as "middle-men" between the Academy and the masses, acting as filters for more radical ideas and techniques, and helping to re-educate audiences. Today, however, the gap between Academy and mass audience is ever narrowing: both Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, for example, have written with considerable popular success, and without compromising their standards, for radio, television, and the cinema, as well as for the stage; in consequence the cultural gradations of high-, middle-, and low-brow seem anachronistic, and the critic less a custodian of treasures, arbiter of taste, and learned explicator than a somewhat harassed umpire in a game being played by artist and audience.

In such a frenzied atmosphere and in an age of profound insecurity, the comfort of predictable labels is alluring; so, too, is the temptation toward oversimplification—an ironic response when directed at artists acutely concerned with the impersonality of modern society and the general abuse of language. While recognizing that the absurd manifests itself variously in contemporary culture, we should nonetheless be able to use it with some precision as a critical term, but, like all labelling and grouping, references to "the absurd" are misleading when they obscure the individuality of the artists and the works of art in question, when they become a substitute for real critical evaluation, and in particular when they suggest that the theatre of the absurd, or the novel of the absurd, or simply absurd art, represents a cohesive school or movement of the sort we designate as Surrealism, say, or Expressionism. Although they occasionally share common influences, those artists who explore in various media the "absurd" environment and man's "absurd" position within it are united not by manifestos or agreements of mutual intent but by certain common elements in modern culture that condition their responses—in particular by their reactions to the emasculation of language through advertising and mass communications, to bourgeois complacency, and to bureaucratic tyranny. Here, in its recurrent concern with the bureaucratization not merely of the state but of the self, rest some of the most constant and familiar sociological implications of absurd art, and here we find a reason beyond decadence for the fact that much literature of the absurd (as well as that of the Subjectivists and Surrealists) is banned in communist cultures.

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* Art of the absurd was born when Alfred Jarry's brilliant *Ubu Roi* opened at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1896, yet when its pataphysicist author died in 1907 his reputation was simply that of one of Paris's more bizarre bohemians; it was more than a generation before Jarry's accomplishment was fully appreciated. In contrast, many members of the audience at the *première* of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1953 were offended by the play's apparent obscurity, but it enjoyed great commercial success, and has now been seen by well over one million spectators. When *Godot* was revived at the Royal Court Theatre in 1964, critics found fault only with the fact that its meaning was, perhaps, a little too obvious. Modern audiences transform the *avant-garde* into the "classic" with almost bewildering speed.[3]

An Alien World

Etymologically, the word *absurd* derives from the Latin *surdus* (deaf) and was originally used to describe disharmony in music; both meanings are in great measure retained in art of the absurd, which is repeatedly concerned with the failure of communication and the general disharmony between man and his environment. Thus, the long-awaited orator in Eugène Ionesco's *Les chaises* is a deaf-mute. The narrator of Samuel Beckett's *Comment c'est* (1961; How It Is) is mute, and his companion, Pim, remembers the forgotten art of speech only after he is savagely tortured. The nameless narrator of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie* (1957), the participating observer of all the action he compulsively describes, neither speaks nor "appears" in the novel. The title of Harold Pinter's second play, *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), designates not merely the mechanical device central to the action, but the situation of the two murderers, who "dumbly" await instructions, and in particular of Ben, left alone at the end to "wait" in the dingy basement room. The literature of the absurd is generously populated with characters who are either literally or figuratively deaf or dumb. We shall consider some further implications of silence in absurd literature in a moment.

It was Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) who first used the term "absurd" with what we have come to think of as its modern implications: the Danish philosopher described Christianity as absurd because no man could justify it according to rational principles, and consequently only the "leap into faith" could bridge the terrifying gulf between reason and belief. Related concepts of absurdity have recurred in the work of French and German Existentialists. They have been used by Martin Heidegger to describe Christian faith, by Jean-Paul Sartre to characterize the apparent pointlessness of life and the terrors of "non-being," by Karl Jaspers as an indication of the manner in which reality repeatedly checkmates the individual, and by Gabriel Marcel as a symbol for the fundamental mystery of life. Despite the varying conclusions produced by these visions of the absurd, they share the sense of a profound disruption in man's relationship with the world around him, and the feeling of anguish that results from the apparent failure of both reason and faith to satisfy the hunger for order and harmony. As Albert Camus argued, "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world."[4] The world ceases to be familiar when even the worst reasons fail to order or explain it; existence itself becomes alien. The old explanations—ethical, religious, social, scientific, even historical—have failed in the eyes of many modern thinkers, bringing them face to face with a meaningless and indifferent universe in which orthodox "systems" can at best offer only superficial reassurance.

At the heart of this *mal de siècle* echoes Nietzsche's famous cry that God is dead. In the absurd universe nothing is worthy of credence: stripped of eternity and tormented by the uncertainty of his own identity, absurd man must content himself with the sole certainty of death. The absurd thus points to two interdependent phenomena: the meaningless universe and man's finite position within it. Absurd literature is particularly rich in metaphorical equivalents for the state of acute alienation, and no work of this kind is more truly seminal than that of Franz Kafka (1883–1924), whose outcast heroes are persecuted by nameless authorities, punished for unspecified crimes, and made repeatedly aware of their infinitesimal significance. Through *Die Verwandlung* (1912; Metamorphosis) Gregor Samsa is made aware of his total estrangement from life, is filled with the self-disgust that often accompanies such awareness, and yet also comes to possess the heightened consciousness of which absurd man is sometimes capable. Following the mass horrors of World War II, Kafka's totalitarian nightmares seem endowed with a new reality. Like metamorphosis, "rhinoceritis" in the work of Ionesco and Camus's "plague" are symbols of man's absolute victimization and the absurdity of existence; similarly, the nausea that overcomes Sartre's Antoine Roquentin in Bonville is a vivid comment on the alien world that 20th-century man inhabits. Earlier imaginations, to be sure, have experienced "nausea" and "plague," and in some measure the recurrence of these motifs in contemporary literature reminds us of man's persistent and ever-renewed compulsion to confront the basic realities of death and time: private grief is constant.

As a concomitant to the loss of faith in spiritual absolutes, the rise of the modern industrialized city has further intensified man's sense of anonymity and isolation. Thus, as in Genet's Palace of Mirrors, man's social and physical environment repeatedly reflects and consequently aggravates the private griefs. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) defined the kind of cityscape in which modern man often seems doomed to function, and the climate of bored, sterile frustration that surrounds his efforts at communication; the specific name of the city—London, Dublin, Oran—is of little consequence.

Gazing out over the Chicago rooftops that form his emotional as well as his physical landscape in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* (1944), Joseph* is oppressed by the vision of ugliness that confronts him:

> The sun had been covered up; snow was beginning to fall. It was sprinkled over the black pores of the gravel and was lying in thin slips on the slanting roofs. I could see a long way from this third-floor height. Not far off there were chimneys, their smoke a lighter gray than the gray of the sky, and, straight before me, ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars, and the occasional bare plan of a tree. These I surveyed, pressing my forehead to the glass. It was my painful obligation to look and to submit to myself the invariable question: Where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, or in the past, had spoken in man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life. And yet, I told myself, there had to be a doubt.[5]

Michel Butor's *Passage de Milan* (1954) opens with a comparable description of Paris:

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* Joseph is never distinguished by a surname. The analogy to Kafka's Joseph K is certainly intentional, although Bellow's hero, even in his most extreme isolation, is more concerned with the state of his society, and like Céline's persona he never entirely surrenders his conviction that his dilemma may have a social cause and hence, by implication, a social cure.

> Abbé Ralon leaned out of the window. There was Paris all around, separated as if by a wall of fog and smoke the colour of iodine, of chestnuts and old wine, then waste ground apparently empty (save for two spare trees—elegant in spite of everything—which had already put forth a few leaves, and were enclosed by palings covered with posters), where looking carefully one could discover old planks, joists, laths and then posts and scrap iron—materials no longer of use, one would think, slowly polished only by the wind and worn away only by dust. And yet, the sordid heap was perpetually prey to subtle change. During the years that the Abbé had observed it—until the very moment of these darkening chapters—as he reluctantly closed his shutters before settling near his lamp to contemplate the windows in their shift from transparency to reflection, a day never passed but that one of these remnants had been displaced, had disappeared, or that a new one had appeared, or an old one reappeared, after an absence of a week, or sometimes a month . . . .[6]

Like the junk heap, the apartment house that Butor's priest occupies clearly stands as a microcosm of society*: its occupants—families and their dependants and lodgers and servants—represent all social levels; they indulge in pointless rituals, ask meaningless questions, and receive equally meaningless answers, or none. Such reactions to urban life are hardly unique to the modern period: they have their distant parallel in the self-indulgent flights of Alexandrian pastorals and underscore the contrast of natural versus arbitrary power and values in the work of authors as different as Shakespeare, Fielding, Wordsworth, and Flaubert; they are yet another example of the perennial need of the imagination to test itself through antithesis. In the modern period, however, the possibility of escaping from such an environment seems increasingly remote, nature itself tainted or corrupt, and the tentacles of a mechanized totalitarian society ever more powerful. Whether earlier writers regarded nature as benevolent or predatory or merely instructional, they typically convey a sense of alternatives, whereas the peculiar feeling of desperation that characterizes so much contemporary writing frequently springs from the sense that there is no alternative. Thus, the city is seen as a reflection of individual consciousness (as in Genet's Palace of Mirrors, again), and nature, where it has not disappeared entirely beneath industrial debris, may well appear as absurd as either—as it does, for example, in the novels of Samuel Beckett.

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* Among the numerous antecedents for this highly effective image is the boarding house in Balzac's *Le père Goriot* (1834). Even closer to the temper of Butor's image, however, is the apartment house in *McTeague* (1899), by the American naturalistic novelist Frank Norris; in that work the sense of isolation is particularly vivid in the case of two timid and gentle old people who inhabit small adjacent rooms that had once formed a single large one. Even more original, however, is Norris's image of the junkyard, whose ever-accumulating detritus is a painful symbol for the wastage of modern urban life. Particularly vivid use was made of both images by Edward Lewis Wallant: a decaying apartment house determines the very structure of *The Tenants of Moonbloom* (1963), and that of the pawnshop is given terrifying dimensions by being juxtaposed, in a montage technique, against memories of life in a concentration camp, in *The Pawnbroker* (1961). In Ezio D'Errico's absurdist drama *La foresta* (1959), the horrors of the concentration camp are invoked by a "forest" of industrial debris in which a group of derelicts await a liberation that will never come. The asylum at Charenton serves a comparable function (although it is a far more complex symbol than those suggested above) in Peter Weiss's *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats Dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospises zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade* (1964; Marat/Sade).

In addition to this concern with the increasingly static quality of the environment in which man must function, literature from the middle of the 19th century shows a growing suspicion of the power of the machine—in short, of the specialized perils of an industrial society; the unreasoning machine is the natural ally of an unreasonable universe. The travesty of mechanization is illustrated by Elmer Rice's pathetic Mr Zero, who falls victim to *The Adding Machine* (1923); by the miraculous invention in Jean Tardieu's *Le meuble* (1955), a machine capable of performing every kind of service for man, which in the end draws a revolver and murders the buyer; by the ultra-modern hospital of Dino Buzzati's *Un caso clinico* (1953; A Clinical Case), which seems designed, ultimately, to usher its inmates out of life as coolly and efficiently as possible; by the grotesque cylinder in which the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is encased; by the technologically perfected *cité radieuse* of Ionesco's *Tueur sans gages* (1957; The Killer), a city stalked by fear and nameless terror; by the dumb-waiter of Pinter's play, which, if not a modern equivalent of a deity, is at least the anonymous, merciless voice of an unseen Authority; and the omnipotent Doomsday Machine of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*—the Moby Dick of an industrial society.

This list, like that in the preceding note, might be far more extensive, but even in this abbreviated form it may help to suggest—by the differing nationalities of the authors and by the various genres in which they work—that the responses that these works embody can hardly be the product of a particular school or self-conscious movement or fashion, and that we must look for their true roots in the common culture of modern Western society.

Samuel Beckett and the Crisis of Language

If art of the absurd can claim a single "master," it is Samuel Beckett (b. 1906), whose novels, poems, plays, criticism, and scripts for television, radio, and the cinema represent one of the most complex and successful attempts to project in art the sense of life utterly bereft of meaning, of existence as inexpressibly absurd. Beckett's interchangeable heroes all live in the shadowland of death and insanity, but they receive no glory, no sanctity, and little wisdom as a result of their suffering. Typically, they are men who *wait*—like the comic tramps in *Waiting for Godot* (1952), whose patient hopefulness demonstrates the absurdity of hope itself, and likewise the absurdity of reason. The luckless Lucky voices the theme in the very deterioration of his speech on the existence of "a personal God quaquaquaqua"*:

> for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull to shrink pine waste and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the teams the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labours abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard tennis . . . the stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished.[7]

Occasionally Beckett's heroes set out on journeys, but when they do so their progress is slow, painful, and often illusory, like that of one of his earliest fictional creations, Belacqua†: "It was morning and Belacqua was stuck in the first canti of the moon. He was so bogged that he could neither move forward nor backward."[8] The near-impossibility of even the most primitive movement in the Beckett universe is brilliantly illustrated in his second English novel, *Watt* (1953), by a description of the hero's oblique progress:

> Watts way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his

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* Since Beckett either translates his own work from French to English or closely supervises the work of his translators in the rare instances where they are employed, I have chosen—for the sake of consistency—to quote all his work in English.

† The character of Belacqua recurs in Beckett's writing: it is derived from the sinner of that name in Dante's *Purgatorio*, who was punished for his compulsive procrastination by being placed beneath a rock and compelled to recall all the wasted days and moments of his life. There are obvious comparisons to be drawn between Beckett's Belacqua, held fast by the rock of lethargy and inconsequence, and Camus's Sisyphus, struggling to force his rock up the mountain-side.

> left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down.[9]

In the trilogy of novels that constitutes Beckett's first major work in the French language, Molloy sets out to visit his dying mother and ends crawling painfully through a primeval swamp. Malone, in the second novel of the trilogy, embarks on a fruitless search for Molloy, a parody of the quest allegory, and returns home in a state of advanced decay, his mission unaccomplished. In *L'innommable* (1953; The Unnameable) the narrator engages in what is yet more obviously a quest for self-knowledge, projecting himself into a series of mutilated pseudo-selves and absurd "incarnations" that concludes with the non-being Worm, who

> has nothing, is nothing. Come into the world unborn, abiding there unliving, with no hope of death. . . . The one outside of life we always were in the end, all our long vain life long. . . . The one ignorant of himself and silent, ignorant of his silence and silent, who could not be and gave up trying.[10]

From Worm there is a logical progression to the creature who crawls through the mud in the utter darkness of *Comment c'est** searching for Pim, only to find in him a vestigial travesty of human companionship. Both philosophically and epistemologically, Beckett brings us nearer than any other writer to "pure" absurdist literature—the literature of silence.

In reply to the obvious question of why he continues to use language when he finds it increasingly suspect, Beckett has replied, "*Que voulez-vous, Monsieur? C'est les mots: on n'a rien d'autre*"[11] (What do you want, Sir? There are words: one has nothing else). But the crisis of language in Beckett's work is acute: hence his desire to "reduce" language to its most fundamental equivalents; his fascination with the language of mathematics; the mime-play *Acte sans paroles I* (1960; Act Without Words); and his preference for writing in French, "*Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style*"[12] (Because in French it is easier to write without style).

The general devaluation of language in absurd art springs from two sources: a distrust of the outmoded "realities" embodied in it, and a tragic sense of the failure of communication in modern culture. Like Bérenger in Ionesco's *Tueur sans gages*, who trails off into incomprehensibility and silence in the final scene of the play, the narrator of Beckett's *Comment c'est* moves toward a frenzied incomprehensibility. The incoherence of such absurd characters and the silence toward which they seem inevitably driven are a comment on the existential void that modern man occupies, and a metaphor representing the failure of "real" communication among men. But it would be wrong to concentrate on the merely symbolic qualities of the apparently incoherent fragments out of which absurd literature is often constructed, for these are often characterized as well by a strong sense of realism: normal conversation is frequently fragmentary, ungrammatical, and illogical, and an attempt to represent such qualities is one characteristic of the diction of modern literature, both absurd and otherwise. The clipped fragments of dialogue in Hemingway's prose also aim at establishing verisimilitude, even while they symbolically mirror the fruitlessness of real dialogue. A dogmatism and a nostalgia for romantic values in Hemingway's work as a whole prohibit his inclusion among writers of the absurd, but his work demonstrates the extent to which concern for the failure of communication and the search for new forms in which to express that failure are embedded within the modern cultural tradition. The void that threatens to engulf absurd man (the same void that many of Beckett's characters actively seek as release from the pain of reality) is brilliantly foreshadowed in the most complex and the most clearly "modern" story that Hemingway ever wrote, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933), where the ramblings of a lonely, anonymous old man deteriorate into Beckettian garble:

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* *How It Is*, the English translation of Beckett's title, unhappily loses the important pun contained in the French original.

> What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada u pues y nada u pues nada. Our nada who art is nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing, nothing is with thee.[13]

Benjy Compson's near-incoherent monologue in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is another important antecedent to the language of the absurd; so too is Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), a novel that "constructs" itself out of the fragmentary speculations of Quentin and Shreve. Despite the discontinuous surface and the elliptical technique of Faulkner's fiction, his primary intention is to achieve a subjective realism—a realism of inner consciousness rather than that of objective and overt observation, and in a world where conventional values (including the values of "time" and history) have been negated, the inner consciousness of an idiot may more nearly correspond with objective reality than that of an apparently more logical character. Both Hemingway and Faulkner have had great influence on contemporary writing, particularly in France, although the greatest influence on the work of the adoptive Frenchman Samuel Beckett was that of another expatriate, James Joyce.*

It is difficult to imagine a defence of his own art more forceful or more "logical" than the essay on Joyce that the young Beckett wrote shortly after their meeting in Paris in 1928. Beckett's tribute was the first of 12 essays by 12 apostles of Joyce, collected under the tongue-in-cheek title *Our Exagmination round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929). Despite the roistering *épater la bourgeoisie* spirit of the essay's conclusion, it contains an important statement of Beckett's own intention:

> Here is direct expression—pages and pages of it. And if you don't understand it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. This rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension.[14]

Beckett's early volume of short stories, *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), is set in Dublin and naturally suggests correspondences with Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), although the ebullient humour shown by many of Beckett's stories results in a work very different in tone from Joyce's. The concern with subconscious reality in *Ulysses* (1922) rather than the meticulous recording of external reality in *Dubliners* is the more obvious source of inspiration for Beckett, and it is not surprising that he should have undertaken the mammoth task of rendering in French the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section of what was then Joyce's *Work in Progress*, even though its completion was left to others. Beckett was drawn to Joyce's experiments with language, and although he has never shared the Master's mystical preoccupations or his voracious reverence for scholarship, their association helps to suggest the degree to which Joyce anticipated the most fundamental preoccupations of the art of the absurd.

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* Proust has been another major influence. Beckett's brilliantly idiosyncratic study *Proust* (1931) is an illuminating guide to his own work: here he found a sympathetic concern with the failure of time-bound language to express immediate, instantaneous reality, an agonized recognition of the fragmentariness of the human personality, of human isolation, and of the failure of communication.

The Disappearance of Plot

The crisis of language illustrated in Beckett's work, and what Ionesco calls "the tragedy of language," are part of a general distrust of aesthetic form as "an arbitrary and independent phenomenon." The content of absurd literature demands new (or re-newed) forms, and there is a sense in which, logically, the theatre or the cinema offers the most fruitful ground for such experiments: spoken words have an immediacy that the printed page denies to reported or recorded speech, and the crucial experience of silence can be most fully exploited in theatrical terms. Nonetheless, the novel of the absurd shares with the theatre of the absurd an expected distrust of plot and characterization. Beckett's *Watt* and *Comment c'est* are ambitious attempts to realize the "plotless" novel; as in the *nouveau roman* generally, authorial omniscience and theoretical objectivity are replaced by an intensely subjective technique that forces the reader to assume the objective role in sorting out the images that characters register. In an absurd universe only the most internal life seems to have any meaning: hence the *nouveau roman* becomes increasingly internal and "subjective," and because the individual himself is seen as elusive, fragmentary, multitudinous, the internal consciousness with which we are presented may well seem mad or "absurd."* Nathalie Sarraute, a leading exponent of this school of fiction, refers to novels

> in which a being devoid of outline, indefinable, intangible, and invisible, an anonymous "I," who is at once all and nothing, and who as often as not is but the reflection of the author, has usurped the role of hero, occupying the place of honour. The other characters, being deprived of their own existence, are reduced to that status of visions, dreams, nightmares, illusions, reflections, quiddities, or dependants of this all-powerful "I."[15]

Such is the narrator of Madame Sarraute's influential novel *Portrait d'un inconnu* (1947; Portrait of a Man Unknown), whom we know only through his pointless, passionate obsession with the external facts of the existence of a colourless old man and his yet more colourless daughter. This "unknown man" usurps the place of both hero and author, and the reader who follows his obsessional ramblings is forced into a position of "objective subjectivity." In the *nouveau roman* as in *nouvelle vague* cinema, the angle of vision is all-important, for in such a world "things" characteristically define themselves in one of two ways: in terms of a character's subjective perception of them, or in their spatial relationship to one another. This concern with a world of objects stripped almost entirely of their anthropomorphic qualities has given rise to descriptions of the new novel in terms of scientific method and *chosisme*; in its most extreme form, such fiction presents us with an objective view of a neutral world of "things" as filtered and arranged according to a character's necessarily subjective view of them. In his rebellion against the omniscience of a Balzac or a Dickens the author as commentator has abdicated; the role of interpreter is surrendered to the reader—or such, at least, is the important illusion created by such fiction.* In Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie* this aesthetic conjuring act is carried to its logical extreme: the central "character" and narrator of the novel never "appears," although he is continuously present, and we know him only through the obsessive interpretations he places on "things"—on a shadow, the angle of a chair, or a centipede crawling up a wall. In this novel nature, like time, repeats and reverses, and ultimately cancels itself: the reader experiences (without seeing) an anti-presence in stasis, and the angle of vision that guarantees this experience is emphasized by the precise diagram of the scene of the action that prefaces the novel.

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* In their concern with the flux of time and the fragmentariness of both human experience and individual consciousness, many of the *nouveaux romanciers* have been attracted to the experimental techniques of John Dos Passos, particularly those for representing the simultaneity of events.

When only the most internal life seems to have any meaning (however questionable even that "meaning" may ultimately appear), the novel tends increasingly toward monologue, and the hero becomes an increasingly cerebral person, though not necessarily an intellectual one. This is true not merely of the characters (or "presences") to be found in the novels of Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, or Michel Butor, but also of Sartre's nauseated heroes, of Alberto Moravia's impotent artist in *La noia* (1960; The Empty Canvas), of Camus's "outsiders," and of Beckett's idiots and tramps, who take such elusive definition as is permitted them in the midst of a total, often chaotic, relativism. Though victims of the world, or of the obsessions they themselves project on the world, only rarely do they cry out against an unjust fate; even more rarely do they gather to themselves those traditional consolations (of pride or wisdom or grace or dignity) embodied in the word "heroism." Although they are not all "anti-heroes," they are nonetheless united by their impotent suffering and, more importantly, by the indifference that greets their suffering. Ultimately, any study of the literature of the absurd must turn to the various manifestations of absurd man: in the absurd universe, no abstraction of God or man or values has meaning—only man himself; no form ultimately has meaning save the form of man; the absurd itself is precisely a search for that meaning and form.

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* The exorcism of the narrator becomes absolute in Andy Warhol's novel *A* (1968), a work "composed" by a tape-recorder.

Albert Camus and the Absurd Hero

Eugène Ionesco has remarked that "every message of despair is the statement of a situation from which everyone must freely try to find a way out."[16] Thus, although absurd literature in all its various manifestations is essentially negative, it is not necessarily nihilistic: in rendering what he regards as a fundamental truth of our times, the absurdist author asks us to share his outrage and dismay; if he often gives no "answers," he nonetheless provokes our quest for them. Traditionally, the word *absurd* has been invoked as a premise that has allowed for various conclusions about the relationship between man and his world; it is not nihilistic precisely because it prompts the search for "a way out." The *noveau roman*, however, often seems to call forth the term "nihilism," partly because of the scientific detachment of its narrative manner,* and even more as a result of the chilling anonymity of its characters. This frustration of the reader's (or the spectator's) humanistic sympathies is, I believe, foreign to the absurd, although such works clearly have both philosophical and aesthetic affinities with absurd literature. Even the presumption that life can be comprehended in terms of the scientific attitude, of "things" stripped of their anthropocentrism, seems foreign to the absurdist contention that no system and no construct can "explain" man's position in the universe.

No modern writer has been more acutely concerned with the failure of explanations than Albert Camus (1913–60), whose *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) provides as rich a work as we have on the implications of the absurd. Camus's subject is man's persistent appetite for unity in the face of a disordered universe; absurd man is known precisely by "the disproportion that exists between his intention and the reality that awaits him."[17] What Camus eventually describes is a stance that man may take in a universe where the old codes of religious, social, and political authoritarianism no longer suffice; the eventual position of Camus's absurd man is anthropocentric, and its ultimate opposition to both suicide and murder is based on the presumption that all promise of value rests in life itself. The feeling of the absurd is born when suddenly the monotonous chain of daily gestures and rituals is broken, and in the void that results man has the opportunity to ask himself "Why?" After this moment of crisis, man either retreats back into the old, drugged existence, or attempts to confront the consequences of his vision:

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* This is more the case with Robbe-Grillet and Madame Sarraute than it is with Michel Butor. A comparison of Madame Sarraute's *Portrait d'un inconnu* and Butor's *L'emploi du temps* (1957; Passing Time) makes the contrast particularly vivid because both employ the techniques of a detective story in parodying the quest motif.

> It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.[18]

The vicious, seductive rhythm of contemporary life is the source of Camus's comparison of modern man with Sisyphus, for both are involved in exhausting, monotonous, and apparently unending tasks. Initially, this vision of man's condition seems nihilistic, but Camus repeatedly urges that

> The feeling of the absurd is not, for all that, the notion of the absurd. It lays the foundation for it, and that is all. It is not limited to that notion, except in the brief moment when it passes judgment on the universe. Subsequently, it has the chance of going further.[19]

Valéry commented ironically on the massive muscles that Sisyphus developed in the course of his labours, but (as John Cruickshank has observed) "Camus wants much more than this. He wants to discover whether some kind of spiritual muscularity can be obtained, and if so, to what positive use it may be put."[20] The development of muscularity, however, depends on the maintenance of two constants: Sisyphus's will (his intention), and the rock that resists it (reality). To deny reality or to cease to will—to opt for suicide or a mindless apathy—is, for Camus, to lose all hope of muscularity, for the absurd depends on sustaining the vital disproportion between intention and reality. The absurd, furthermore, demands defence as the one "truth" isolable in the modern environment; the absurd hero is the man who asserts, and if need be defends, his right to disproportion.* With such a hero, achievement ceases to be a question of victory or defeat, but a matter of the intensity and persistence of struggle.

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* Clearly Camus's final interest is not in the man who demonstrates just any kind of disproportion between intention and reality, but with the man sufficiently strong to sustain a disproportion on the level of values, a man who persists in his demands for truth in a universe that says that truths are impossible.

Absurdity is a defiance of the universe, a negation of gods, an extreme tension that will never permit the hero to rest, just as the tormented Sisyphus can never pause in his task; maintenance of the absurd, moreover, is the only way in which man can rebel against the apparently meaningless universe, because rebellion that does not orient itself to truth is meaningless.

The tragedy of Sisyphus, Camus argues, comes from the fact that he is conscious; but consciousness is a prerequisite for happiness as well as for tragedy:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. The universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.[21]

The underlying, tacitly accepted premise of Camus's study of the absurd is that "man, without the help of the Eternal or of rationalistic thought, can create, all by himself, his own values."[22] The absurd becomes the extreme articulation of the necessity of man's appealing to himself as a source of values; its method is the embracing of life with the belief that only through this embrace can man arrive at the goal of truth.

Camus's arguments on the absurd are highly impressionistic, and it would be unfair to demand of them the logic or consistency of a finalized philosophical system. Furthermore, his own use of the word is ubiquitous; it refers variously to the meaningless universe, to the man who suffers in it, to the awareness of suffering, and to revolt against the world. Nonetheless, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* sets out a number of principles that should be central to any discussion of the absurd, and in particular it emphasizes the fundamental quality of resistance that marks the absurd hero. In *Le mythe de Sisyphe* this quality results in a stance whose heroic dimensions are easily recognizable,* but in Camus's fiction and plays *l'homme absurde* assumes rather less conventional forms, three of which suggest themselves as models for discussing the absurd hero: the criminal (Caligula), the passive resister (Meursault), and the rebel (Tarrou and Dr Rieux).†

In *Le malentendu, suivi de Caligula* (1944; Caligula and Cross Purpose),

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* Don Quixote and Don Juan are among the "ancestors" whom Camus recognizes for his absurd hero.

† The idea of rebellion is important in all these characters; in his philosophical writings Camus moved logically from *l'homme absurde* to *l'homme révolté.*

Camus dramatized the young emperor's growing awareness of the absurdity of existence; in an attempt to force his complacent patricians to acknowledge it as well, he behaves himself in the most outrageously absurd manner, challenging a hostile and destructive universe by the sheer force of his own despotic and destructive powers. Although Caligula's actions are hostile to the reverence for life that Camus found at the heart of the absurd, criminal activity is one way of sustaining the disproportion between intention and reality. No more powerful expression of this response is to be found than in the work of Jean Genet. Genet's intention is to unseat bourgeois values, to make us accept our own darkest selves, and to create a morality of drugs, thievery, imposture, homosexuality, and murder that is the precise inverse of the conventional (and hence life-denying, absurd) morality to which his characters are denied admission. In a world where all men are outsiders, the criminal and the convict, bathed in improbably elegant imagery, stand for and suffer for the universal human plight; hence the criminal in Genet's work is often metamorphosed into the saint,* and in *Notre-Dame des Fleurs* (1944), Our Lady achieves his moment of greatest glory when he ascends the scaffold. Like Sartre, Genet sees man as caught in a tumult of existence, whirled around by forces that defy understanding, and groping for a sense of reality (or continuity, or even causation) by assuming a variety of socially unacceptable roles. This inverted world is memorably illustrated by Genet's plays as well, in particular by *Le balcon* (1956; The Balcony), where the brothel owner, Madame Irma, rules over an Aladdin's Cave of illusion and pretence, and where the charades of sex and political power and religious ritual grind ceaselessly on.

A firm distinction must be drawn between the criminal as absurd hero and the more conventional Robin-Hood-style "criminal" of romantic literature, who stands for a superior morality with which society at large has lost contact. Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus, like Byron's Don Juan, are direct antecedents of the absurd hero as criminal; similar concepts are to be found in Herman Melville's *Confidence Man* (1857), Dostoyevsky's underground men, Thomas Mann's Felix Krull, André Gide's *L'immoraliste* (1902), the epicurean persona projected in the novels of Henry Miller, J. P. Donleavy's bumptious *Ginger Man* (1955), and Joyce Cary's Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth* (1944). All these characters adopt in some degree principles of subversion, immorality, chicanery, or violence in expressing their rebellion, but the more extreme criminal type of modern literature is distinguished from the "over-reachers" who preceded him in that we have no sense (as we do, say, in Marlowe) of rebellion against an ordered universe that may eventually strike the offender down and restore in some measure a lost equilibrium. There is no equilibrium in the absurd universe: hence, the more "motiveless" the criminal's actions, the more clearly they reflect the chaos that surrounds him. The social order that punishes the criminal and checks his activities is seen not as the embodiment of justice (human or divine), but as the emanation of a capricious power structure. No artist in our own day has carried this sense of the necessity of the criminal response as far as Jean Genet. William Burroughs has attempted to do so, but his work frequently lapses into incomprehensibility, and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965), in spite of the powerful originality of its conception, trails off into romantic sentimentality.

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* Following the author's own lead, Sartre paid tribute to his countryman in a work entitled *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (1952), a dense and massive essay in hagiography.

Although a murderer is the subject of Camus's *L'étranger* (1942; The Outsider), the subject of that novel is not the absurd hero as criminal but the absurd hero as "passive resister." Meursault's ostensible crime in murdering the Arab was an automatic, unreasoned gesture that simply marks the beginning of the process of self-awareness recorded in the novel. In *Le mythe de Sisyphe* Camus repeatedly emphasizes that the absurd is not a feeling restricted to the philosopher, but one potentially as meaningful for the insignificant civil servant as for the conqueror or the creator. Meursault himself is a colourless and insignificant clerk whose real "crime" in the eyes of society is his refusal to mourn the death of his mother; it is this that marks him as an "outsider"—a man who refuses to subscribe to the conventional panaceas of filial piety, friendship, economic success, marriage, or prestige. He refuses all such masks, just as he refuses to lie in court to save his own life.* His unconventional attitude is even illustrated by the short, choppy sentences in which he tells his story, its relative freedom from figurative expressions, and the rejection of the conventional literary tense in favour of the *passé composé*. Meursault does not proselytize or actively rebel, but he persistently refuses to subscribe to the values that society attempts to thrust upon him: until the moment of his death he passively resists all efforts at "recruitment," and hence sustains the vital disproportion between intention and reality. Camus originally entitled Meursault's story *L'indifférent*; at moments in his writing he seems to judge indifference as a weakness, but in *Le mythe de Sisyphe* he sees a kind of serene greatness in the refusal to be moved by that which is irrelevant to the realm of private experience. Indifference so firmly orientated to inner truth bears no relation to surrender; it constitutes, instead, an act of defiance. The same passive maintenance of the absurd tension can be seen in Beckett's *Murphy* (1938) and in the tramps who wait in a world without hope in the ever-renewed hope of Godot's materialization; in James Purdy's *Malcolm* (1959), "a cypher and a blank," who nonetheless refuses the series of labels that society attempts to fasten on him; and in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*, Joseph, who rejects the conventional roles of husband, brother, and friend, as well as the minor badges of social defiance and non-conformity, in order to conserve his strength and to give "all his attention to defending his inner differences, the ones that really matter."[23] Joseph is not ultimately successful in maintaining this disproportion, and at the conclusion of the novel seeks social accommodation within the ranks of the army, confessing that he has not done well "alone" in the world, but his surrender illustrates two important phenomena in modern literature: first, that the hero who is freed from social conventions must then contend with the massive existential problem of the management of his freedom; secondly, that after the "Why?" with which absurd awareness and estrangement begin, an increasing number of characters have begun to seek the road back into society in some manner that will still permit them to defend their own "inner differences."

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* Meursault has a direct ancestor in Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby," about the man who "would prefer not to," and dies in prison.

This tendency is fully explored in Camus's brilliantly allusive novel *La peste* (1947; The Plague), which contains a rich gallery of absurd men who react in a variety of ways to that spectre of a cruel and meaningless universe symbolized by the plague. The asthmatic old Spaniard who, in the midst of a suffering and dying city, continues to measure out his life by transferring dried peas from one container to another has the apparent pointlessness of Beckettian man, sucking stones or playing endless games of chess, but it is he who first realizes that the plague *is* life. For the sensitive priest Father Paneloux the absurdity of the plague prompts the Kierkegaardian leap into faith; the Parisian journalist, Raymond Rambert, first attempts to deny the plague by escaping from the besieged city, but later, in the name of love, joins in battling against the disease. All these responses are in some measure absurd, but Camus's greatest sympathy is given to two men whose responses more precisely recall the struggles of Sisyphus, for Tarrou and Dr Rieux determine to fight the plague despite its apparent omnipotence. Both men gain in knowledge and compassion as a result of their struggle, but it is Tarrou in particular who emerges as the most convincing illustration of the Camusian premise that the struggle for truth becomes truth itself. What we know of Tarrou's background suggests certain thematic affinities with Meursault. At the age of 17, while attending a murder trial at which his father served as public prosecutor, Tarrou had felt all his sympathies enlisted by the murderer and against a society whose existence seemed a denial of the worth of the individual. Hence he had become a political revolutionary, only to be repulsed, in turn, by the violence intrinsic in revolution. All men, Tarrou realizes, in some way aid or abet the murderer; his growing pessimism threatens to estrange him utterly from the community of man until the plague gives him the opportunity of making a purer gesture against death than his previous circumstances had ever allowed. This image of the absurd hero as *l'homme engagé* and *l'homme révolté* has more in common with conventional notions of heroism than the criminal or the passive resister; such men seem to argue that although victory is not possible, defeat is not final, and the frequency with which they make their appearance in even the most "absurd" contemporary literature is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit. Out of the depths of his own inmost spirit, and without recourse to traditional religious or philosophical absolutes, man finds the strength to cry out in the name of humanity against even the most hostile reality. Like Garine, the complex hero of Malraux's *Les conquérants* (1928), he refuses to settle for the vision of suffering and ugliness with which he is presented: he accepts the absurd only to rebel against it. Similarly, Ionesco's Bérenger sees all those around him succumb to the fashionable "plague" of rhinoceritis, happy to adopt the insensitivity, the aggressiveness and brutality, of animals, and yet he clings fast to his humanity, even when Mademoiselle Daisy, the woman he loves, is herself transformed and he is left alone. Save for a fleeting moment in which he regrets this outcast state, he takes fierce and defiant pride in his humanity:

> Now it's too late! Alas, I'm a monster, I'm a monster. Now I'll never become a rhinoceros, never, never! I'm past the point of changing. I should like to, I really should, but I can't. I can't stand the sight of myself. I'm too ashamed! [*He turns his back on the mirror*] I'm so ugly! Bad luck to those who try to hang onto their individuality! [*He suddenly snaps out of it*] Oh well, too bad! I'll take on the whole lot of them! My rifle, my rifle. [*He again turns to face the back wall, where the heads of rhinoceroses are fixed, shouting all the while*] Against the whole lot of them I'll defend myself; I'll put up a fight against the whole lot of them. I'm the last man left, and I'll stay that way until the end. I'm not capitulating![24]

To be human in a world of animals is to be "absurd"—estranged, lonely, and even "illogical"; to make that absurdity a truth of existence, to cling to it and to defy the animals, is to be an absurd hero. In a kind of inversion of Bérenger's situation, the hero of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) defies the masses of unthinking, unregenerate mankind by making himself the "pupil" of Atti, a gigantic lioness, and learning from her the disciplines of reality and nobility that man has forgotten. Bellow's heroes, like those of Samuel Beckett, illustrate the degree to which the quest motif recurs in contemporary writing, and the narrator of *Dangling Man* suggests the varying impulses that prompt the quest:

> The quest, I am beginning to think, whether it be for money, for notoriety, reputation, increase of pride, whether it leads us to thievery, slaughter, sacrifice, the quest is one and the same. All the striving is for one end. I do not entirely understand this impulse. But it seems to me that its final end is the desire for pure freedom. We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit—to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace. And, if the quest is the same, the differences in our personal histories, which hitherto meant so much to us, become of minor importance.[25]

Thus Barmadu, the protagonist of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932; Journey to the End of the Night), although he believes in nothing and hopes for nothing, cannot resist the urge to set out on a journey in search of *something*: Beckett's Watt, Molloy, Moran, Malone, the Unnameable, and the narrator of *Comment c'est* all embark on quests; so, too, do Jacques Revel in Butor's *L'emploi du temps* and the narrator of Genet's *Journal du voleur*: and those who do not literally set out on journeys nonetheless frequently embark on voyages of discovery within their own souls.

The quest itself is but one manifestation, though a crucial one, of the absurd hero's power of resistance: he is a man who says no to reality and refuses to accept the absurdities with which it presents him; and here, as in all other forms of absurd struggle, the outcome of the quest matters less than its intensity. This quality of resistance to defeat distinguishes the Bérenger of *Le rhinocéros* (1960) from the character of the same name in *Tueur sans gages*, whose antagonism toward the menacing killer is gradually worn away, and who in the end submits to an absurd death. Similarly, the pathetic pantomimist in Beckett's *Acte sans paroles I* ultimately abandons the attempt to make contact with his world, and this is not, one suspects, an example of absurd indifference, but instead a stifling of his intentions in the face of a hostile reality. Such characters merit the term anti-hero in a way that even Genet's most depraved criminals do not.

"In the streets of my time"

Art of the absurd has ancestors and progeny without number: there is a sense, of course, in which all art is "opposed to" reality, and hence absurd; and a sense, too, in which the most memorable characters in the history of literature are "absurd" heroes; yet never before has the sense of man's utter abandonment in an absurd universe been so intense or so pervasive as it has become in Western society in the decades following World War II—a fact noted as often by the philosopher and the sociologist as by the artist. Commenting on his own role as "spokesman" for the absurd, Camus once asked: "What did I do but reason about an idea that I found in the streets of my time?"[26] The phrase "in the streets of my time" asks to be taken literally as well as figuratively. For the American sociologist-philosopher Paul Goodman the title *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) summarized the frustration of younger generations contemplating a society that left no room for the exercise of their finer instincts, no medium through which their natural energies could be translated into clear-cut and recognizable results. Again and again we are confronted in absurd literature with the little man—the petty clerk or salesman or office worker, the hen-pecked husband, the secretary, or the tramp—harassed by a nameless bureaucracy or a capricious "justice" that takes no reckoning of individual needs or of individual suffering. Meanwhile, with the deeply imbedded memory of totalitarian horrors, an awareness of the possibility of nuclear annihilation, and a sceptical attitude toward both secular and religious institutions, modern man comes increasingly to see existence itself as "absurd."

In attempting to define black humour—a mood that permeates some of the best American writing of the post-war years, and that has obvious affinities with the absurd—the American novelist Bruce Jay Friedman finds the source of this response "in the streets of my time" indeed, and cites random reports from *The New York Times* as a black humour handbook.

> A ninety-year-old Negro sharecropper lady watches Ladybird Johnson—on a poverty-inspection tour—sweep up to her shack in a presidential limousine and says, "Ain't it wonderful." Fun-loving Tennessee students pelt each other with snowballs and suddenly scores are dead of heart attacks and gunshot wounds. A mid-flight heart-attack victim is removed from an airliner, suddenly slides from the stretcher and cracks her head on the runway. . . . Sixteen U.S. officers in Germany fly through the night in Klansmen robes burning fiery crosses and are hauled before their commanding officer to be reprimanded for "poor judgment." It confirms your belief that a new, Jack Rubyesque chord of absurdity has been struck in the land, that there is a new mutative style of behaviour afoot, one that can only be dealt with by a new, one-foot-in-the-asylum style of fiction.[27]

Art of the absurd is anti-bourgeois and anti-establishment; it often mocks the spiritual and political beliefs of an older age to which men cling even when they have ceased to represent truth and have been reduced to *cliché*, but art of the absurd must often seek preposterous forms and preposterous statements in order to outrun the absurdities of the real world.

Nonetheless, although art of the absurd may employ outrageous means, it is not merely outrageous, for even as it denies the old verities, it prompts the search for new ones: hence the recurrence of the quest theme in the literature of the absurd, and hence, too, the love motif that emerges in even the most apparently nihilistic moments in the work of such writers as Beckett and Genet. Because the ultimate crisis of values in modern Western society can be seen, if at all, only in terms of the subjective, individual consciousness, art of the absurd is seldom concerned with specific causes; such writers are disillusioned with causes, and with political, economic, and even "historical" man: the long-awaited Maître of Ionesco's play finally appears as a man without a head—dressed in an overcoat and wearing a hat. An indifference to causes grows, as well, from a conviction that the malaise of Western society is more basic than any institutional investigation could suggest; consequently, art of the absurd is so often apolitical. It is perhaps partly for this reason that absurd literature has had few exponents in Great Britain or America. Although both countries have been appreciative hosts for the theatre of the absurd, they have not made their own contribution to such a theatre to the extent that the French have done, or that other Europeans are now in the process of doing. Paris continues to give its renowned nourishment to *avant-garde* writers, and yet there are certainly deeper cultural explanations for the relatively small contributions made by British or American writers (and for the "logic" we sense in Samuel Beckett's expatriation). In England even the most militantly *avant-garde* writers are still in great measure concerned with class problems, which give a more conventional shape to their work: this is true even of such a "revolutionary" play as Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1965). In America the writer often casts his work in terms of such dominant social problems as race relations, although there are signs that a tradition of the absurd, in something like the purer "French" sense, is now emerging in America, and that Edward Albee will no longer stand as its almost sole representative. The absurd has played a far more important role in the American novel than it has, to date, in the theatre—in the work of James Purdy, Burt Blechman, Thomas Pynchon, William Gass, John Hawkes, and Richard Brautigan, for example; and yet art of the absurd, in its most extreme forms, will no doubt continue to be challenged to some degree by the sense of optimism and concern for practical solutions that so strongly colour American thinking.

Nonetheless, art of the absurd so thrives on shock and surprise that the game of prediction is a doubtful one; nor, in an age of profound insecurity and doubt, does the instinct of anticipation seem at all reliable. All that is certain is the present moment, and in the present moment a large and significant group of Western artists are questioning the most fundamental truths of their societies, and voicing their questions in tones that are often shrill, strident, and preposterous. Yet the very fact of the question represents a triumph over silence, and an affirmation of the belief that human life has value. As Camus remarked in "L'énigme":

> Denying all significance to the world amounts to abolishing all value judgments. But living, and feeding oneself, for example, is in itself a value judgment. One chooses to stay alive the moment he does not allow himself to die, and he then recognizes a value, at least relative, to life. What, in fact, does a literature of despair mean? Despair is silent. Moreover, even silence is meaningful if your eyes speak. True despair is the agony of death, the grave or the abyss. If it speaks, if it reasons, above all if it writes, immediately a brother reaches out his hand, the tree is justified, love is born. A literature of despair is a contradiction in terms.[28]

Art of the absurd speaks in a variety of voices, and its somewhat amorphous philosophy allows for an equal variety of conclusions, but properly considered it has little to do with the fashions of alienation, the commercially militant *avant-garde*, senseless cruelty, or wilful obscurantism. Its techniques, however great their debt to ages past, are "new" because they have been discovered anew and because they have been given a fresh relevance in their application to modern institutions and conventions. The result is a vital, controversial art that attempts to break down the apathy that comes from modern man's almost continuous bombardment with words and pictures; it cuts across the bounds of tragedy and comedy and ushers in that age of tragi-comedy that Thomas Mann predicted in *Past Masters*; and it declines easy answers and facile interpretations alike. In its very variety and complexity, it intensely mirrors the age in which it is created.

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CHAPTER 5

Experiments in Creative Language

Jean-Jacques Mayoux*

I

Like everything connected with man, language is continually wearing out and dying. Yesterday's novelty is today's *cliché*; language needs to be constantly remoulded and renewed, a process that can be either spontaneous or self-conscious. There is a magical aspect of language, too: Adam's naming of creatures in the Garden of Eden gave him power over them. There is both power and mystery in words. We know that the pun or other play on words was used in naming, identifying, and defining the Egyptian gods. The Christian Church, as James Joyce pointed out, was founded on a pun (Matthew XVI: 18): *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam* (Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church) with a pun on the name "Peter" and the Latin *petra* (rock). Men have never been content merely to use language; they have always played with it as well. The malapropism—unconscious punning by ignorantly using the wrong word, which sounds like but has a totally different meaning from the right one—is older than Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop, Smollett's Winifred Jenkins, or Fielding's Mrs Slipslop; older even than Shakespeare, who also used it for comic effect. And criminals are not the only social group who have their own language (thieves' slang) in order to combine the useful (in this case secrecy) with the picturesque.

The language of creative genius is in a sense always experimental in that it plays individual variations on public themes, but in this chapter I shall discuss only those experiments in language in which the writer not only displays a definite interest in the handling of language but also consciously parades discoveries and inventions for the attention of the reader. Even within the limitations of such a definition it would be impossible (as well as insufferable) to produce a complete catalogue of experiments; instead, I shall try to illustrate the chief trends with appropriate samples. I shall also try to keep clearly marked the border between significant literary experiments in language and the sort of literary eccentricity (so common in English literature) where the liveliness merely provides a sort of galvanic animation, as in the Grand Panjandrum nonsense-speech attributed to Samuel Foote (1720–77) or, very frequently, in the works of Lewis Carroll.

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* Professor Emeritus, Université de Paris III.

The ancient awareness of language not only as an artistic medium but as a means of capturing reality itself, as a magic, seems to have been elaborated anew by 18th-century French thinkers such as Diderot, who in his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1771; Letter on the Deaf and Dumb) propounds his theory of an objective absolute created by language, which he calls the "hieroglyph." He develops this theory further in his *Réfutation de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé De l'Homme* (1773–4; Refutation of Helvetius's Work entitled *Of Man*), where he advances the more startling proposition that because each man's sensations depend on an extremely individual organization, his language would be equally unique and irreducible—and thus of no social use at all—if it conformed in the same way to individual experience. In other words, we always have to combine in some degree the urge for self-expression and the need for social communication.

Some small-scale experiments in language are done for fun rather than for the sake of language itself; portmanteau words such as "trembulation" can be found among the malapropisms of Winifred Jenkins in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771). The game starts in earnest with Lewis Carroll (1832–98), centred on the figure of Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). But there is no general assault on the establishment of language until 1910 and the work of Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944), the founder of Futurism.

II

Marinetti's human and political choices—war,[1] Mussolini—are hateful; they are not easily separated from his literary doctrine, and his reputation has paid the price. An objective look at his personality and work, however, shows that he was an extraordinary innovator, and that his ideas or suggestions could have been detected and investigated with profit in many quarters where they have been ignored or dismissed out of hand. Consider his manifestos and the essays in which he presented them: Dada, concrete poetry, and much of Surrealism are all there in germ, if we can rescue them from the puerile vanity and the bombast that is even noisier than usual in such necessarily histrionic attacks on literary and artistic establishments. The charge of puerility can be brought against the work as well as against the man. Clearly, he had little taste or judgment, and what we may still venture to call his genius is bounded by narrow limits.

The theory—the essentially destructive programme—is to be found first in the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futuristica* (1912; Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature). Homer's syntax, Marinetti suggests, does not fit the airman's world. Obviously, this means that because what changes in the course of human history is the moods, forms, and rhythms of our sensibility, literary modes are the more subject to change the closer they follow the moves of that sensibility. What he wants is an almost purely affective literature, with language to match. The renewed vision, savagely dehumanized, proposed to keep matter "in its molecular aspects," to introduce into literature, direct and unaltered, noise, weight (and levitation), smell. "The deep intuitions of life joined one to the other word by word according to their illogical birth [literally, 'to their to be born,' *nascere*, because Marinetti has decided to recognize the infinitive] will give us the general lines of an intuitive psychology of matter." He is fond of the word *catena* (chain): "To give the successive movements of an object we must give the chain of analogies that it calls forth." Chains of analogies, or associations: what Marinetti seems to lack is any awareness of the unconscious that holds them in reserve to respond to their proper stimuli. As for the structuring of language, he proposes to "suppress all the first terms of our analogies, give no more than the uninterrupted sequence of the middle terms, and cease to seek to be understood. It is not necessary."

Parole in libertà (words at liberty) is the all-inclusive formula, comprising "condensed metaphor, telegraphic images, sums of vibrations, knots of thought . . . dimensions, weights, measures, and speed of sensations." Compositions will aim at overcoming the doom of literature, which is succession, and create simultaneity*: "I have gained that simultaneousness that obsesses alike futurist painters and poets." And again: "The poet will launch on several parallel lines several chains of colours, sounds, smells, noises, weights, thicknesses, analogies. . . . One of these lines may be pictorial, the other musical." The dominant chains of sensations or analogies should be marked by larger type.

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* The attempt to see the literary work as something that exists simultaneously in space and not in a chronological sequence is characteristic of much of modern literature. The characteristic modern critical method, too, is to see works—whether poems or plays or novels—as patterns of imagery that depend less on chronological unfolding than on simultaneous interaction. Gerard Manley Hopkins' aim was to write poems whose meaning would not emerge in a temporal sequence but "explode" in the reader's mind once he had read the whole poem. Joyce, in *Ulysses*, explores several ways of giving the impression of the simultaneous occurrence of a variety of incidents in different parts of Dublin (see the "Wandering Rocks" episode), and in his punning use of words like musical chords. Both in this novel and in *Finnegans Wake* he attempts to say several things at once just as a chord sounds several notes at once.

Marinetti, then, deals with *ortografia libera espressiva* (free expressive spelling). The lyrical intoxication that he proposes must freely distort, then re-incarnate (*riplasmare*) the words, cutting or lengthening them, strengthening them at centre or ends, increasing or diminishing the number of vowels or consonants. It will take trained *speakers*, he says, to make these renewed words intelligible. Thus with Marinetti we have the first break with the written tradition.

From theory he then swings into practice. Here he is aboard a train, and the language is meant to gather speed. There are seven a's in *viva*, the last three in capitals of increasing size: a train journey constantly builds such patterns. Next, and equally effective, as if accompanying wheels on rails, there is *finalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente finalmente FINALMENTE POESIA NASCERE*, which goes with the ever-renewed close-up effect of the moving train, *treno treno treno treno tron tron tron tron tron.* A steel bridge compels sheer onomatopœia, *tatatluuuutlin sss ssss iii ssiisssssiiii.* Words, as far as they are still there, are simply a support for the rhythm of motion. Motion, however, is not in a vacuum. The world sends in its constant stream of sensations, the traveller is *punzecchiato dal sale marino aromatizzato dagli aranci cercare* [the usual infinitive] *mare mare mare* (teased by the sea-salt perfumed by the oranges seek sea sea sea); the motion is again insistent, *balzare balzare rotaie rotttttaie roooooooottaie* (which may be rendered roughly as "leap leap rails raaaiills raaaaaaaaills"). Then again the senses open to the world through a series of adjectives. "I mean that sea, sky, mountain are greedy, salty, purple etc. . . . and that I am greedy, salty, purple etc . . . all outside me but also in me, totality, simultaneity, absolute synthesis."

"I oppose," proclaims Marinetti, "the decorative and precious aesthetics of Mallarmé and his quest of the rare word, of the unique irreplaceable adjective, elegant, suggestive, exquisite." His savage alternative (including *parole in libertà*) can be discovered in the book that he entitled (with variants) *Zang Tumb Tuuumb Tuuuum*,[2] the jacket of which is a programme, because it is patterned crosswise with these warlike onomatopœias. Various sketches give us the experiences and the enthusiasms of an amateur war correspondent. "Mobilitazione" (Mobilization) is a pictogram in which *strada scendere* (going down the street) is then interpreted as

scendere
scendere
scendere
salire
scendere
scendere

"thirty-five kilometres in the bones of his feet, go up go down; deep cough in the bronchials of the horizon"—the cough of the guns toward which the soldier is marching. The Balkan war, which seems small enough now in retrospect, satisfied him completely, and was the occasion of elementary experiments in imagist—verging on concrete—poetry. The sketch "Hadirlik quartier general turco" has a cheerful calligram of a multiple execution by hanging—

IMPICCAGIONE
1 2 3 4 5
Traditori
Spie
Disertori
Professori
Bulgari

—in which it is visible on the page how *disertori*, *professori*, *Bulgari* (deserters, professors, Bulgars) hang together. Marinetti, who dubs the victims *cadaveri sandwich* because each carries his labelling, did not lack "black" humour.

Some of Marinetti's much more elaborate designs (and the reader is referred to the original for these) will, for example, build up a balloon of word-segments with hanging ropes of the same and criss-cross patterns of noises, and so on (*rrrrrrrrzzzzzzzante d'un monoplano bulgaro . . .*). "Ponte" is more elaborate, and it may well be here, as much as in Édouard Dujardin's *Les lauriers sont coupés* (1887), that Joyce (living in Trieste) found a model for his interior monologue. There are passages of free-flowing, unpunctuated, impressionist language, attempting to render directly both the impact of the external world on a particular character and the way his consciousness deals with that impact, which remind us of paragraphs in the third ("Proteus") episode of *Ulysses*, where the reader is presented with a fluid verbal rendering of Stephen's combined sense-impressions, thoughts, and memories. *Battaglia* is an endless enumeration of descriptive words interspersed with onomatopœias of war noises in thicker type. But, in spite of his verve, Marinetti palls: his externality, his monotonous pitch of high excitement, his noises (sound being, after all, the only sense datum that literature can more or less reproduce), are insufficient, and his liberation of language is incomplete.

Before leaving Marinetti, we might recall his origins. He was born in Alexandria and educated in Paris. His first book of poems, *La conquête des étoiles* (1902), was written in French and published in Paris: his Italian Futurism grew from a ground of French Symbolism. It is at least a curious coincidence that again and again we are going to find that men of the borderlands, cosmopolitans, and polyglots will be associated with linguistic experiments in literature.

III

In 1910 Marinetti went to Moscow and St Petersburg to spread the futurist gospel among the young Russian poets: Symbolists, Acmeists, formalists, and others. In 1913 Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), one of the most vigorous of the Russian Futurists, was already proclaiming the independence of their movement. The ground had been singularly fruitful. In *Symbolism* (1910) Andrei Bely (1880–1934) stated: "The creative word creates the world: all knowledge is an upsurge of words whereby I replace a vacuum." The first Russian futurist manifesto, signed by Velimir Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, and others, appeared in 1912 under the title *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*. In 1914 the 21-year-old critic Victor Borisovich Shklovsky was bidding the poet achieve the resurrection of the word as a sound unit and built up into new effects within the shape of the sentence. In 1913 Mayakovsky himself published *Murmurs, Noises, Din* and *From Street to Street*. With a strong onomatopœic and alliterative texture went repetitions of syllables, a new vocabulary, a renewed syntax, puns, and word-play. Echoing Marinetti, he started his own campaign, *Free the Word*: "Down with the common word. Long live the word all newly made, holding its own finality." He listed the aspects of his revolution:

> The word against meaning.
> The word against literary language.
> The word against rhythm.
> The word against metre.
> The word against syntax.
> The word against etymology.

The word, then, as Lewis Carroll had suggested, need not be a semantic constant: it can be deflected from its traditional meaning. And words come first, not "ideas" or "subjects." Any fact can be wrapped up in "an astonishing net of words."

Before e.e. cummings, and in a similar spirit of synthesis, we find Mayakovsky opening a word (*potchta*) and inserting a whole line in between the two halves:

potch-
perekinulos na shyne
ta.

Of them all, however, the most vivid creator of language was Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922), the most genial of the Cubo-Futurists and the true founder of Russian Futurism. Like Mayakovsky he believed in the freeing of the word, in the first instance by the destruction of pre-existing stability. His "trans-sense" or "metalogical" language (*zaumny yazyk*), creating new words from existing roots and reaching out to a new universal idiom, suggests sometimes the Dadaists and sometimes James Joyce. Certainly some of Khlebnikov's linguistic devices seem to have been re-invented by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*. For example, Khlebnikov makes old words into new by wilful slips of the pen. *Dvoryane* yields *tvoryane*, one letter turning the aristocrats into creative workers as if *gentry* became *agentry* (*dvoryarin*, nobleman; *tvoreniye*, creation; *tvorchestvo*, creative work); the poet's invention uses the extreme flexibility of Russian and its mode of composition. *Mudryi* (wise) blends with the mere future *budyet* (will be) to produce *budryi*, which calls to mind *bodryi* (vigorous), so that, in a manner impossible in our analytical languages of the West, one new word gives the tint of futurity to a quality of both wisdom and vigour. The play of language can also be between a sustained metaphorical and a literal sense running parallel and emerging alternately. The number of sources tapped by Khlebnikov again reminds us of Joyce: archaism, slang, dialect, other Slav languages, Sanskrit, and Persian.[3]

It will be seen that the audacities of the West pale into insignificance beside the flamboyance of this short-lived Rome-Moscow axis. One might mention also—although his *Calligrammes* (1918) are visual arrangements of language rather than attempts to remould it—another Slav-Latin cross, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), born Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitski of a Polish mother and a (probably) Italian father. He wrote in French: and a French-writing Italo-Pole is symbolic of the international cross-fertilization on which experiments in language in modern literature have so much depended.

IV

When we consider Italian and Russian Futurism, Dada has an air of inevitability: Futurism + the War = Dada. It was a war that was no longer an exhilarating catharsis, but an object of deep, absolute, unutterable disgust. For an artist in words the blind instinctive reaction of despair and revolt is to smash the language of the docile crowd, and perhaps later build something of his own, clean and uncontaminated. The *locus classicus* here is to be found in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1920), set during World War I. In the light of the reality of war, the hero can find no meaning in the conventional language used about it:

> I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concerte names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.[4]

In Zurich in 1916 artists who had taken refuge in neutral Switzerland from the neighbouring holocaust banded together in the Dadaist movement. Although the Alsatian poet and painter Hans Arp, the Swiss painter Paul Klee, the Austrian painter and photographer Raoul Hausmann, the Rumanian poet Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), the Dutch painter and architect Theo van Doesburg (whose real name was C. E. M. Kupper), and others were all involved in this revolution, in which the visual arts were concerned as well as literature, I shall content myself, as a sample, with a brief examination of the work of Hugo Ball (who was born in Germany in 1886 and died in Switzerland in 1927, and who in his later years turned to writing on religious subjects) and the German poet and artist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1941).

Hugo Ball probably has priority in time and initiative, and may be left to expound the principles of *Wortdichtung* (poetry of the word):

> We have now driven the plasticity of the word to a point at which it can scarcely be surpassed. We reached this result at the cost of the logically constructed, intelligible sentence. . . .[5]

Here again is the voice of Marinetti: down with syntax, down with logic, down with the sentence. The poet retains only the infinitely plastic word, out of which to build a new language:

> We have charged the word with forces and energies, which enabled us to rediscover the evangelical conception of the Word (*logos*) as a magical complex picture.[6]

However unevangelical, they are ready to ransack the Gospels for metaphors and to claim for the Word the demiurgic, literally creative power of the *logos*. We must return, says Ball, to the innermost alchemy of the Word (the phrase is Rimbaud's); the magic is far from holy and has lost all evangelical connection. Ball paid due homage to Marinetti and his circle for initiating the destruction of the sentence and the freeing of the word. He and his associates, however, went farther in the glorification of the separate *Vokabel*, which meant not preserving but destroying the word as it pre-existed, inventing it fully anew. Such is the basis, Ball remarks, of Schwitters' *Lautdichtung* (sound-poetry) as well as of his own *Verse ohne Worte* (Verses without Words) of 1916–7, in which what might be called the abstract values within the word—the "balancing" of the vowels and structural organization—are what is finally to be cultivated.

Paradoxically, however, this re-invention of language can make use of *sprachliche Readymades*. In this we recognize the climate of *collage*, and realize the curious effectiveness of fragments of speech, newspaper headlines, and so on, that are insignificant in their normal frame. Schwitters himself defined the development of his *Merzdichtung** as analogous to that of his *Merzmalerei*, as given parts, fragments from newspapers, posters, catalogues, speeches, and so on, with or without change and with no necessity to fit a particular meaning.

It is difficult to make an objective assessment of Schwitters' *Lautgedichte* (sound poems), constructions of noises in which perhaps we have an origin of *lettrisme:*

Boo/ ker/ rel/ prrrr
Bel au hau/ bel au hau fraa
Naa/ kaa/ naa/ kaa. . . .

Almost at the other extreme, "Anna Blume" (1920), one of Schwitters' best-known poems, with slight and playful distortions of syntax, seems to me more of a nonsense poem than anything else. Other poems, on the way to concrete poetry (i.e. poetry whose meaning is as much conveyed by the physical shape and arrangement of the words on the page as by the meaning of the words), are mainly visual organizations of one identical word on the page, in alternating small letters and capitals of various sizes. Perhaps more interesting are attempts to discard enough, retain enough, not of sentence or sense but of words, so that out of stump and torso, assonance and dissonance, a faintly significant emotional shape emerges:

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* "Merz-poetry." The word *Merz* (like *Dada*) is meaningless. Schwitters cut it out of a newspaper at random, getting *Merz* as a syllable of *Kommerzbank*. Similarly, he called his painting *Merzmalerei* and his architecture *Merzbau*.

Er sie Es:
unt
Hund
tak pack
Karakte
duumdu
dirindir
Gott gnadet du
leben
laufen
streben
vergeben
schenken
dirindir
tak
pack
duumdu
du

Dignified (except for a grotesque "recipe" for a poem by Tristan Tzara) and impressive as the manifestos were, it may be granted that this is no major poetry and that we have not greatly progressed since Marinetti. Or we might say that when a major poet emerges from Dada, he ceases to be one of the faithful while retaining an essential freedom of the imagination. Such, it seems to me, is the case of Hans Arp (1887–1966), an Alsatian who wrote German poetry in the Dada years, then by degrees turned to French and called himself Jean Arp. He was bilingual from childhood. Here again we find this attraction of the borderlands to the questioning and the games of language, perhaps because it is always seen at a distance, and indeed there is always about Arp something of the child hearing a foreign language and finding it funny. "Words are fresher for me in French—German I have known so well since school." "Arpists at cloever spillings," said Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, and the German Dadaist Max Ernst talks of the *arpocrypha*. With his two languages Arp is an admirable adept at this game: *Weisst du schwartz du*, or *J'hirondelle tu hirondelles*.

V

James Joyce (1882–1941) will be seen to dominate this essay, for it seems to me that he was at the very centre of the great movement for the exploration of the possibilities of language: Joyce, the Catholic in revolt, blasphemous, sacrilegious, determined almost from the first to steal from God himself the instrument of the creation of reality, the *logos*, the Word (we have seen Hugo Ball make the same point). The analogies of some of his principles or techniques with Dada are as certain as they are limited: *Banalität*, or the use of banalities, was one of Hugo Ball's points and one of the springs of the power of *collage*. But those words in the street, suddenly appearing, ready-made, and lodging themselves in the consciousness like a mystery, are they not the point of the Joycean epiphany,* the means of a revelation of reality through the insertion of irreducible otherness? Joyce was in Zurich in 1916 and, like the Dadaists, drank the white wine of the Café Voltaire; he had also been in Trieste from 1910 to 1914 and could hardly help knowing about Marinetti and *le parole libere.* Behind these novelties, there is in Joyce the inheritance of Flaubert, which was more complex than one might think: the language of Bouvard and Pécuchet is *Banalität*, yet language as Art, with fine adjectives and fine adverbs, is everywhere; the quest for the hieroglyph, for the word that conjures the sudden rose itself,† that effects the miracle of real presence, is paramount.

"What I am seeking," Joyce says in the same spirit, "is the perfect order of the words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate. That is the quest for the objective absolute. It may be: 'perfumes of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely he mutely craved to adore.' "[7] He had spent a whole day, he told Frank Budgen, on the polishing of two sentences. The exaggeration and pose that we may detect in this confidence are also Flaubertian.

Each phenomenon of language, even though it can be detected in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), can be found more active and decisive in *Ulysses* (1922): it is, first of all, an enormous *exercice de style*, in which the rendering, the technique, the formulation, the manner of saying the thing and conveying the message, are not only more important than the thing or the message, but in fact *are* the thing or the message.

Joyce's *exercice de style* starts with a decision of objectivity: the writer shall almost never speak with his own voice, or write with his own style. His power shall come from his infinite readiness, suppleness, and skill in the service of other moods and other modes absorbed into himself. An immense pride and arrogance are concealed behind this discretion: the critic* can never properly get at the writer: a system of screens and coverings laughs at his onslaughts.

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* "By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments."—O.A. SILVERMAN (ed.), *James Joyce, Epiphanies* (Buffalo 1956).

† Browning's phrase, in "Transcendentalism."

One of the dominant ideas in *Ulysses* is that everything included in the book should be self-expressive in various ways. Gerty MacDowell-Nausicaa feeds her vacuous girlish mind on cheap, sentimental magazines. She is therefore seen through a transparent veil of that very idiom: her physical portrait itself thus becomes a mental portrait. In the Sirens episode the hieroglyph is larger, not concentrated on the Sirens (the barmaids Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy) but interpreting the whole episode over which they preside in terms of musical language: fugal, as Joyce said, but including many other musical allusions, and following fruitful musical analogies—the working-out of a theme, the progress through the phrasing of a *leit-motiv*, the gradual approach and movement toward full presence, "bloo who bloo whose . . . greasabloom . . . bloohimwhom," until Bloom entire is before us. The interests of sound expressiveness tend to disorganize the previous static word. "Full tup. Full throb" absorbs a potential, never-actualized full stop. The open ear registers a variety of simultaneous sounds, and any coherence must be pulled apart to make room for these hints of simultaneousness. The language is un-centred, dissociated from any particular speaker; the result is a sort of Cubist synthesis of the moment—time and space unit—the creation of a structure that expresses human reality although it has left the order of realism. The Sirens episode reminds one, perhaps because of the germane subject, of Picasso's canvas of the *Three Musicians*, who are still present as individual existences, yet fragmented and absorbed and lost into the surrounding reality of paint.

The extreme diversity of the 18 books is to be envisaged within this ruling intention: the Aeolus episode reflects the atmosphere of the journalists' den and the preoccupations that go with the making of a newspaper and that give it shape. Walton Litz[8] has given a careful and learned analysis of this book in terms of rhetorical devices. Obviously the disciple of the Jesuits had learnt all about them. Obviously, in his determined manner, he meant to put in, to stuff into the episode, all he could.

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* Wyndham Lewis, for example, attacked Joyce in *Time and Western Man* (1927), in which he defended the classical virtues of intellect and order against the subjectivism and the immersion in the flux of consciousness that he saw in Joyce and other modern writers. A comparable stand was taken in France by Julien Benda.

Litz has compared the *Little Review* version with the last one, and has found that Joyce not only inserted all the newspaper headlines in large vulgar capitals, but also employed 30 more devices including the palindrome (Madam, I'm Adam; Able was I ere I saw Elba), the zeugma (the father of scare journalism and brother-in-law of Chris Callinan), the metathesis (clam dever), the chiasmus, and others. This of course shows obsessive consciousness of language rather than the will to seek new ways. But it stimulates the search.

In its better and more creative parts, *Ulysses* is not content with seeking, within a vision of the world as representation, the particular representation through language of different types of the human comedy. It sees the universe as language, as (if we open our ears and listen) confused prose or inchoate music, as endlessly distorted but always significant utterance. Joyce-Stephen, in his meditation on the beach, hears it:

> these heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here. And there, the stoneheaps of dead builders. . . . Sands and stones. Heavy of the past. Sir Lout's toys. . . . I'm the bloody well gigant rolls all them bloody well boulders, bones for my steppingstones. Feefawfum. I zmellz de bloodz odz an Iridzman. . . .[9]

"The people who did the rough work at the beginning, they were giants. My Sir Lout has rocks in his mouth instead of teeth," Joyce explained to Budgen.

Later on, Stephen listens again to the voice of the tide. "Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos. . . . In cups of rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And, spent, its speech ceases." Then the weeds, lifted and dropped by turns, take up the speech: "Lord, they are weary: and, whispered to, they sigh. Saint Ambrose heard it, sigh of leaves and waves. . . ."[10]

Mr Bloom visits the cave of Aeolus, and his ear perceives similar utterance: "the door of Ruttledge's office whispered: ee, cree. . . ."[11] And then he hears the printing machines: "Sllt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forwards its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way."[12] "All a kind of attempt to talk," Bloom muses again in the course of the Sirens episode.[13]

Joyce, connecting the structures of language to its uses, explores the various techniques of communication. As Bloom and Stephen return to Eccles Street,[14] he uses systematically all through these 72 pages a technique of catechism or examination, of question and injunction:

> What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning? . . .
>
> What did Stephen see on raising his gaze to the height of a yard from the fire towards the opposite wall? . . .
>
> Describe the alteration effected in the disposition of the articles of furniture.

This technique fascinated the French novelist Robert Pinget to the point that in a whole considerable book, *L'inquisitoire* (1962), he used it as an instrument of discovery.

Ulysses, however, would not be the landmark that it is in the history of 20th-century literature and of literary language without the use (let us not say the invention, because Joyce himself did not claim it) of the interior monologue. Here at last we rejoin Diderot's speculation completely: here we have this affective language of the individual, as unique as a fingerprint. Here Wyndham Lewis's criticism of Joyce, comparing this device to Dickensian telegraphese, is most fatuous, because it takes no account of the organic connection of such monologues with a living memory and with the circuits active within a living mind whereby a certain stimulus will call up to the consciousness a specific and revealing chain of associations.

"In my book," Joyce told Budgen, "the body lives." Even if we do not take seriously the tables of correspondences* that were drawn under Joyce's own instructions, including the various organs involved, we may still believe that Joyce has to some extent, with subtle skill, inflected his language to this effect, although the example he himself gives to Budgen is rather feeble: "Mollie's legs," Bloom cogitates, "are out of plumb." Joyce explains that when Bloom's mind is reminded of food by his body (we are among the greedy Lestrygonians), *plumb*—which is also *plum*—comes readily to it as a sort of spontaneous paronomasia. At any rate it comes readily to Joyce's ingenious mind, and helps to give the passage a word-colouring which is at least interesting as a modest prelude to the *Finnegans Wake* practice of altering the language in a bolder manner to fit the dominant or obsessive theme. For instance, *Monday*, in a kind of mental prelude to mastication, becomes *munchday*. "At another time of day," Joyce comments, "he might have expressed the same thought without any underthought of food."

The inner language was more important for Joyce, as a way of gaining a new province of reality and realism, than it was for any of his imitators, whether Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner, or any other.

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* Joyce told Stuart Gilbert and Frank Budgen that each episode (apart from the first three) corresponded to a different organ of the body.

Joyce tried to reproduce the inchoate shape of language yet unborn: "Ba. What is that flying about? Swallow? Bat probably."[15] And he sought the utmost individualization of language. Three characters in *Ulysses* are seen sufficiently from the inside for their mental infra-structures to be definable and for Joyce to reflect them in mental speech: Stephen, Bloom, and Molly. Perhaps Molly's monologue is the purest, the most transparent example, a perfect flow of serenely sensual associations without a pang or slowing or quickening, except just the gradual numbness of coming sleep in total peace of mind. Stephen's mind, being identified with the conscious psyche and intelligence of the writer, is on the whole the most literary except when it passes into sudden, savage hallucination, instantaneous vision of murderous aggression and revenge—"bits man spattered walls all brass buttons. Bits all khrrrrklak in place clack back."[16]—with an equally swift and humorous reversal of mood: "Not hurt? O, that's all right. Shake hands. See what I meant, see? O, that's all right. Shake a shake. O, that's all only all right."

Bloom, objective-subjective, allowing Joyce to work off his perversities by pouring them into the most obviously (most superficially?) alien mould, Bloom a caricature of an ever-calculating, speculating Jew, is when need be reabsorbed into his creator through a common melancholy, a sense of the weariness of the flesh and the futility of life: "I wanted then to have now concluded. Nightdress was never. Hence this. But to-morrow is a new day will be. Past was is today. What now is will then tomorrow as now was be past yester."[17] It is Bloom who first formulates for Joyce the doctrine of "returningty," as *Finnegans Wake* will apply it: "Curious she an only child, I an only child. So it returns. Think you're escaping and run into yourself. Longest way round is the shortest way home."[18]

These few examples show sufficiently what I have termed the inchoate aspect: language as it is being formed between brain and muscle, as a reaction stimulated by what appears of present or past on the inner screen; present impressions—which make the difference between this constant substratum of waking wool-gathering and the dream-state proper—calling forth fragments of the personal past stocked up in the memory. Each *forma mentis*, both of the individual and of the type (introvert or extravert), is marked by a certain relation with the so-called external world, openness to it or not, straightness of impression or immediate elaboration, quality of the echo, number and depth of the upsurges from the inner core of being. Carefully, Joyce builds up and renders a double consciousness, or rather consciousness and what he himself calls *underthought*: thinking about something and being pre-occupied by something, the underthought being what commands the chains of associations without which the interior monologue would be as meaningless as Wyndham Lewis suggests. Joyce's own notes to his play *Exiles* (1918) show how interested he was in these chains, and to what extent he connected them with sexual obsessions or temptations. The disconnected aspect, the broken syntax, of the monologue compels awareness of the two levels: "Must get that Capel Street Library book renewed—Re-incarnation, that's the word." In this simple case what we have is merely the mind dealing with a small point of current affairs, groping under its surface thought, rummaging obscurely for something that was eluding it; so the upper consciousness, even in its spontaneous, fragmented, haphazard aspect, still has the upper hand. The contrary is more usual: the underlayer pushes up and breaks through. Affectivity rules the day: frustration, humiliation, distress, remorse. In the case of Bloom, the main obsession is of course the inevitable cuckolding set for that afternoon:

> If he . . .
> O!
> Eh?
> No. . . . No.
> No, no. I don't believe it. He wouldn't surely?
> No, No.
> Mr Bloom moved forward raising his troubled eyes. Think no more about that.[19]

And, soon after this repressed worry that Blazes Boylan might give his wife venereal disease, we read:

> He other side of her. Elbow, arm. He. . . . Touch. Fingers. Asking. Answer. Yes.
>
> Stop. Stop. If it was it was. Must.
>
> Mr Bloom, quick breathing, slowlier walking, passed Adam Court.

This is not mere "stream of consciousness," but an attempt to render in language the physiology of the emotions.

VI

And now, in spite of retarding actions, we have to face the monster, *Finnegans Wake* (1939; author's corrected version 1964), and its messes of mottage. Perhaps, after all, having said much in preparation, I need not say so much now. As bits of "Work in Progress" appeared here and there, philologists soon became aware that this was their cup of tea. C. K.

Ogden wrote a learned preface to *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun* (1929) in which he stressed the importance in Joyce's verbal creation of the process familiar to agglutinative languages called the *infix* (opening the word to insert a supplementary meaning within). The portmanteau image might conceivably be replaced by that of the sandwich. Ogden enumerates, among Joyce's practices, root-cultivation, rhyming slang, analogical deformation, onomatopœia, phonetic and kinetic puns, dialect, spoonerisms, condensation ("the timeless condensation of the dreams"), mergers, and echoes. It will be noticed that Ogden is not at all disturbed by this array of novelties; on the contrary, he demonstrates that they are both legitimate and acceptable. Since we need not deal here with the structure, but only with the texture, of the book, perhaps it will be useful to retain, first of all, the word *echo*, which we find at the end of Ogden's list. For *Finnegans Wake* is a gigantic, enormous dream-echo of all life as it was known to Joyce. From that point of view, the already rather delirious glozing on the book, which would have amused him as one more instance of the "learning" that he was parodying, will increase in apparent if not real use from year to year as the allusions and *clichés* that are the building-blocks of Joyce's new language fade into history.

The echo distorts, and to Joyce it is the distortion that really matters. Any word, any sentence, any paragraph, can be picked up by the creative mind and altered into something, the significance of which is emphasized by its accidental connection with this neutralized substratum. We have previously mentioned the *collage* and the curious power of elements sticking out of the *collage*, separate and inane words, to create meaning, to insert themselves into the mind. But here again the thought that will come to the mind will be that of Picasso making an oxhead out of handlebars or a goat's head out of a bicycle saddle. Without doubt, Joyce's spirit in his verbal creation is at one with modern art.

Thus the work may be said to run on, not as the continuity of a single line, but rather on a curious system of parallels, one carrying the old, flat, *cliché* meaning, another consisting of the modifications and perversions that it has undergone in the liberated and malicious mind. The former makes a permanent infra-structure into which the collective and social (history and legend), the endless pressure on the individual, from birth, of all human institutions, and the tough individuality (mainly sex) are then inserted. Not only the old words but also the old word-blocks must subsist and be recognized under the new for full awareness of the intention at work, which has modified it. In this way, in fact, the new language becomes all intention.

When we read *painapple*, we may ask what part the underlying *pineapple* plays. It serves as motionless to mark the motion against it, and concentrates our attention on Adam's apple, anatomic and jocular symbol of the fall, and on the penalties that it has entailed. "Putting Allspace in a Notshall" is an admirable combination of "putting all space in a nutshell," and the hint that the contemporary condition of the universe suggests the prohibitions of some Urizen. "The Ouragan of Spaces," on the basis of *The Origin of Species*, in a curious mutation from time to space, seems—again in a sort of Blakean vision—to unleash through it howling winds. In this great prose poem, these are noble phrases. It is rather the metaphysical intellect of Joyce that is at work in the ingenious portmanteau word *returningties*, which brings eternity back within the system of recurring cycles that Joyce takes from the 18th-century philosopher Giambattista Vico. *Dustiny*, with the same compact economy, sums up the "dust to dust" of all human destiny. With the same vastness of reference, Joyce describes history as a *meandertale*: from the brutishness of Neanderthal man to this day, it has been a sinuous and confused, a "mazyful" itinerary.

On an easier, freer level, Joyce was perhaps never to recover the verve of paronomasia of the early pages of *Finnegans Wake*, particularly of the Jute and Mutt dialogue:

> Jute. – Are you jeff?
> Mutt. – Somehards.
> Jute. – But you are not jeffmute?
> Mutt. – Noho. Only an utterer.
> Jute. – Whoa? Whoat is the mutter with you?
> Mutt. – I became a stun a stummer.
> Jute. – What a hauhauhauhaudibble thing, to be cause! How, Mutt? . . .
> Jute. – One eyegonblack. Bisons is bisons. Let me fore all your hasitancy cross your qualm with trink gilt. Here have sylvan coyne, a piece of oak. Ghinees hies good for you.[20]

The pun, in the same way as the portmanteau word, is the result of the thrust forward of some other meaning, which is helped by the shape of the "parent" word. It is to some of us a constant temptation to seize on each near (sometimes, in fact, outrageously far) coincidence to effect this blending of meanings. Joyce secures astonishing results from singularly small and discreet manipulations, which is part of his power, of his mastery, over language: "Toborrow and toburrow and tobarrow! That's our crass, hairy and evergrim life. . . ."[21] (Lat. *cras*, tomorrow; *heri*, yesterday.) And the summation: "Wins won is nought, twigs too is nix, tricks trees makes nil." (*Wins won*: this articulation of past participle with active present of *to win* over the basis of *once one* emphasizes the nothingness of success.) Joyce's greatest successes in parallel phrasing result from his achievement of total convergence of meaning within the new language of intention as well as perfect parallelism with the old language of contingency.

Thus the writer is seen to compose not in words but in larger units. His permutations within word-groups strike the imagination with revelations of new meanings. Such permutations have been spontaneous, and have—through curious mixings of the mental circuits—produced, for instance, the spoonerism. In Joyce a lucid application of the same principle provides "this ourth of years," in which our earth bears organically the weight of its age.

Joyce's first, undeniable point is to restore concreteness to language worn out, or at least worn down and in any case overlaid, by evolution. *Zweifel* (doubt) in German retains the living memory of *zwei* (two), unlike *doubt* or *doute*. Hence Joyce will write, "You have become of twosome twiminds." *Perhaps* is all right, but we may want to change its connotation: it will then become *perhopes*.

There is the spirit of metamorphosis in those words of Joyce's, so living, so restless they are, and we never know in what shape, with what intent, they may arise. Joyce himself noticed that in the old Irish language there is an alphabet of trees, *ailm*, *beith*, *coll*, *dair*, as vivid as the Hebrew *aleph* (ox), *beth* (house), *gimel* (camel), *daleth* (door). There is, in those words, a spirit of fluidity that makes them appropriate to his boldest and most fascinating practice: they take their colouring from their environment, and change with it. Language becomes theme language. Incestuous preoccupations, vaguely censored, engender the insect theme: all that comes near is insectified. *Insincerity* turns to *inzanzarity* (It. *zanzara*, mosquito): "Libelulous! Inzanzarity! Pou!"[22] (Fr. *libellule*, dragonfly; *pou*, louse). The river theme inspired by Anna Livia Plurabelle is much more notorious, some would say ponderous, because Joyce has patiently worked in 150 river names by way of paronomasia.[23] "I am still waiting" becomes "I amstel waiting." "It will soon be late" yields "It saon [Saone] is late." (Individual examples seem lame and unconvincing: it is the general impregnation, the small, constant attraction and variation, that matters.)

The affective language of *Finnegans Wake* is much more deflected and obscured by sexual preoccupations than in *Ulysses*. There already we found the Freudian slip at work, and Bloom, when he meant to speak of his wife's advisers, was heard to say "My wife's admirers." Here the slip is everywhere. Sexual arithmetic or geometry is rife and builds up a language: "traduced by their comedy nominator to their loafest terms for their aloquent parts."[24] A "dolightful sexsex home" becomes naturally "the whome of your eternal geamater," and Shem launches into a description of Anna Livia's "sixuous parts . . . midden wedge of the stream's your muddy old triagonal delta . . . the no niggard spot of her safety vulve."[25] It may be noted that if the writer is not a John Cleland or a Frank Harris, and yet is obsessed by sex and wants to bring it in, it is apt to become a source of obscurity through instinctive or, more likely, calculated concealment. Perhaps Mallarmé's obscurity is in part connected with such a cause. Clive Hart,[26] taking the Edgar Quinet flower motif, shows what strange, indiscreet, but also more and more nebulous alterations it has been subjected to: the more indiscreet, the more nebulous.

Take a phrase such as "the lilies of the field": evangelical, righteous, the perfect "cover" for the unrighteous to shelter behind. But he does not escape detection. For what he says is, "the lilliths oft I feldt": again not one word but in mutual action the whole of a word-group has been turned upside down by the underthought: feeling the lilliths is obviously a more active but less holy occupation than that implied by the lilies of the field. Not only is Lilith Adam's diabolical first wife, but the doubling of the *l* adds another erotic note and perhaps connects it with Swift's little language.

VII

Vico dreamed of universal language; Joyce, as we have seen, was haunted by the idea of opening out the national language. He spoke four languages fluently, besides learning Norwegian for Ibsen's sake, and beginning with Dutch for his own, and had a smattering of many others. The 29 peace girls embody as many languages: Breton and Basque have their niche somewhere; Dano-Norwegian remains a curious favourite, perhaps because there were so few to share with Joyce the glory of knowing it. B. J. Tysdahl[27] has carefully studied the Norwegian captain episode in the *Wake* and found it packed with Norse words: over 50 of them on certain pages. But Joyce did not need to know a language to put it in: he asked Stuart Gilbert for some Burmese word; he did not pretend to know Japanese, but wrote to Harriet Weaver that "the words expressing nightmare are from the Greek, German, Irish, Japanese, Iranian, and Assyrian." It was an act of magic import to insert them.

Sometimes, apart from this magic, the introduction of a new language adds nothing but gratuitous grace: as in the charming "wait till the honeying of the lune, love," which in a second version replaced the earlier "wait till the rising of the moon." Sometimes there is an impressive convergence of two words and two languages. In the very international Mutt and Jute passage we have "Now all are tombed to the mound," in which tombed is both entombed and *tombés* (fallen). On the double ground of Baudelaire's *Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!*[28] (Hypocrite reader—my kin—my brother!) and Joyce's Shem, we get "my shemblable, my freer," which has his characteristic charm of self-mocking irony. Yes, Shem is both brother and freer: does not the creative writer seek his own freedom in or through creation?

Joyce's intention, very much in control of the "uncontrolled" intention active within a dreamer's cerebration, has been seen to bring accretion of meaning together with loss, and confusion of meaning together with clarification of undermeaning. Such as it is, it could still have made a different book if Joyce, reading Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), had not received through him a diabolical hint from Mallarmé: set the riddle, then throw away the key. Throwing away the key, Joyce is revenged for all the humiliations he ever underwent, the only master of a tantalizing universe, the priest of a mystery, giving just enough hints now and then—

> What is papyr meed of . . . hides and hints and misses in print

—so that curiosity should not die of despair. So the quest for Finnegan goes on and on. Curious formulas meet our eyes. Then someone tells us, having had luck in the treasure hunt, that these "holes emitting mice" or "Father has lost an eye" or "house not very dirty" are "ready-mades" straight from Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree's *Poverty: a Study of Town Life* (1901). Similarly, when we read about Issy and her linking lass, we rashly conclude that this just connects Isabel or Iseut la belle, the celebrated Earwicker daughter, with Alice and the looking-glass. Then someone comes along and tells us that the reference is to a case study (by Mortin Prince, a Boston psychiatrist) of a schizophrenic—whom, of course, we can detect here at her antics.

Of all these tricks, the least fair compel us to inquire into Joyce's personal interests; and so, when we read that Shaun can translate from the Otherman or off the Toptic, we realize that Joyce is echoing his own early lecture on James Clarence Mangan, who was perhaps a bit of an imposter when he claimed to be translating from the Ottoman or the

Coptic. We must therefore distinguish between the obscurity of the language and the usually deeper and more frustrating obscurity of the message. Everything here, beyond what it superficially presents, is a hint of allusion to something else, and requires not only enormous vigilance and attention but—again in the tradition of 18th-century learned wit—considerable and miscellaneous knowledge; it requires, too, the turn of mind that makes one good at solving the more recondite crossword puzzles. When we read about someone reborn of the cards, we must guess that it is just a bit of funny literal translation and refers to René Descartes. Samuel Beckett was to practise the same trick of literality more poetically about the same character who "climbed the bitter steps"[29] because he was seigneur Du Perron.

The most pleasant way, if one is not crossword-minded, to learn about the language of *Finnegans Wake* is to read the letters that Joyce wrote to Harriet Weaver, who, because she said that he should be able to write as obscurely as he cared, was (he thought) entitled to clarifications. She and other correspondents were also entitled to admissions of his wilfulness:

> I put a few more puzzles into my piece. . . . What the language will look like when I have finished I don't know. But *having declared war* I shall go on jusqu'au bout. . . .[30]

Two contradictory ideas seem at work in his mind: that of expressiveness, and that of disguise. It should be enough to study F. H. Higginson's admirable variorum edition of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (1960), or to compare the different versions of the letter from Boston, to become aware of the ingenuity with which Joyce inserted his new puzzles into a simpler draft.

This ingenuity could have been the death of *Finnegans Wake*, and its damnation to eternal academic life. Poetry was its salvation, and it may be noticed that it is in the most poetical passages that the re-creation of language, including infusion of foreign elements, is most persuasive. Consider the love-song for Anna Livia:

> I did umgyrdle her about . . . I wound around my swanchen's neckplace a school of shells of moyles marine to swing their saysangs in her silents. . . .

VIII

In literary art, Joyce bestrides his time like a colossus; the present-day reader will be ready to smile at an attempt by Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) to share with him the attentions of the magazine *transition* and the highbrow Franco-American chapels. An extraordinary neglect has fallen over her work, and a few enthusiasts are no compensation for this. My present terms of reference mean that I must as far as possible distinguish—in her case as in others—innovations in literary language from even the freshest or most sophisticated use of it that leaves it more or less as it was found. The disentangling in this case is not at all easy. I shall try to deal briefly with the essential points, and send the interested reader, for more details, to Donald Sutherland's excellent study.[31]

She seems to me more clearly and definitely connected than Joyce with Dada and the Surrealist movements. She is less interested than Dada in the "plasticity" of the word, but, like Ball and Schwitters, she is interested in almost abstract movement, in the secret pulsation of separate, successive elements, most of them devoid of any "message," and carefully non-coherent.

> Six
> Twenty
>   Outrageous
> Late
> Weak
>   Forty
> More in any wetness
> Sixty three certainly.
> Five
> Sixteen
> Seven
> Three.
> More in orderly. Seventy five.

Sutherland points out the affiliation of her work with music—for instance, the staccato—and he quotes from *Operas and Plays* (1921):

> Josephine. Josephine is called. And she has. Displaced Xenobie. Also. She has well said. That she will not stay. That is. She. Maybe. There. All. Are. Pleased.

Sutherland admits that here the punctuation is more or less equivalent to a verse-form. We may grant him in return that the effect is different, and that our sensibility—ear and mind—is caught and held differently. Let us take from *transition* 3 a more significant text:

> As a Wife has a cow a love story.
>
> have it as having, having it as happening, happening to have it as having, having to have it as happening. . . . My wife has a cow and now—My wife has a cow.

But for my considerable and perhaps fatal cuts, we might say that here, through a sort of repetitive conjugation, mostly in progressive tenses, we have, as *continuous* present, the slow development of an event, opening out, creating its own reality within the consciousness: for it is there, in the consciousness, that the event is happening, and slowly displacing a vacuum.

Laura Riding, in the same number of *transition*, writes of Gertrude Stein, ambiguously: "Originality of vision is invented not by the artist but by the collective time-sense." And she quotes:

> Beginning again and again explaining composition and time is a natural thing. It is understood by this time that everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition.
>
> The composition is the thing seen by everyone living in the living they are doing.

It will be seen through such a passage that there is no reality in life, but only a shadowy basis for "composition"; and that it emerges as a process as slow and imperceptible—as unchanging, yet changing after all—as if we held a film in our hands and looked at a succession of apparently identical stills, and saw in the end that an arm had moved slightly, that the head was a little more bent.

"I find I have changed my meaning in changing my meaning from the meaning I had to this meaning." Stein is subject to the kind of surprise marked by "I find." The writing is (or pretends to be) uncontrolled, near-automatic (and she did practise automatic writing). The Advertisement to "Lucy Church Amiably" (which is in theory about the Church at Lucey) says:

> Lucy Church Amiably. There is a church and it is in Lucey and it has a steeple and the steeple is a pagoda and there is no reason for it and it looks like something else. Beside this there is amiably and this comes from the paragraph.

(This is her way of saying that "amiably" was put there because it came to her and looked well.) What she here ascribes to the paragraph will elsewhere be due to "an arrangement." There is, we might say, on the one hand arrangement, on the other contingency, treated rather as Beckett treats it, as the revelation of absurdity:

> If you see the mountain clearly it means that it will be rainy if you see the mountain it means that it will not be rainy if you see the mountain clearly if you can see the mountain clearly it means that

> it will not be rainy if you can see the mountain clearly it means it will be rainy if you see the mountain clearly it means that it will be rainy.

If the usual proposition wins by a short head (so to speak) it seems almost to be by accident, and as if luck might just as well have favoured the opposite one, which after all looked just as good on the page. Edmund Wilson notes that Stein seems "to have made a practice at this period of shutting herself up at night and trying utterly to banish from her mind all the words ordinarily associated with the ideas she had fixed up."[32] She certainly would welcome, then, those other words that would insist on coming up, in the manner of automatic writing:

> A sound: Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chew all bolts and reckless rats, this is this.

It sounds a little like a prose version of *The Hunting of the Snark.*

In "An Elucidation," which appeared in *transition* 1, she expounds her doctrine simply by applying it—by letting her arrangement work itself out:

> The sad procession of the unkilled bull. And they stand around.
> Two next
> To be next to it
> To be annexed
> To be annexed to it

Or, from "First Example":

> Suppose, to suppose, suppose a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose. To suppose, we suppose that there arose here and there that here and there there arose an instance of knowing that there are here and there that there are there that they will prepare, that they do care to come again.

Among other things that Gertrude Stein achieves in many of the passages here quoted, we must put continuity: created by this favoured disciple of William James, the very stream of consciousness is given in word groups losing their identity through repetition, running into one another, creating a curious dimension of time, a projection from the self yet connected with the awareness of the slow, universal, constant shift and change. Not only Gertrude Stein thought that Hemingway learned some of the secrets of his art by correcting her proofs. The beautiful slow motions near the beginning of *A Farewell to Arms* are an adaptation, perhaps a vulgarization, of the vision behind her style.

IX

Whoever wants to realize the excitement and passion that were generated by the idea of a revolution in literary language should get hold of the 27 numbers of *transition* from April 1927 onward. In its pages we find brought together the old Futurists such as Marinetti, the protagonists of Dada—Hugo Ball, Schwitters, and others—Joyce and Gertrude Stein, and, to connect them all, Eugène Jolas, the brave and enthusiastic spirit who made this small review the meeting-point and springboard that it was. In *transition* 11 (February 1928), in his essay "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce," Jolas noted, in connection with the surrealist revolution, the recovered, semantic fluidity of the word. As examples he cites Michel Leiris's experimental glossaries (Jolas must have been among the earliest to hail them, and they implement significantly what we might term Humpty Dumpty's Manifesto, that names be tied and words be free); the vigorous neologisms of L. P. Fargue; and the verbal mutations attempted by German-speaking poets such as August Stramm and Hans Arp:

> Stramm limited himself to . . . taking nouns and re-creating the adverbs and adjectives. Arp, more ironic, played havoc with the lyric mind by inventing word combinations set against a fantastic ideology. Certain others went so far as to reproduce merely gestures by word symbols.

English and Joyce stand central to this enterprise as united in universality, conscious or not. Joyce, as Jolas stresses, goes beyond polyglottism, stirred by Vico to a sense of "the common nature of linguistic origins." Prompted, probably, by Joyce himself, Jolas notes the then recent work of Marcel Jousse[33] on universal language patterns of rhythm and gesture. And he marks the importance, to maintain communication beyond all verbal re-combination, of *audibility*. As Joyce was (or saw himself to be) at a distance from English, so Jolas (a Lorrainer with three languages—German, French, and English) seems to have sought re-integration and salvation in this process. In *transition* 22, he recalled his manifesto in issues 16 and 17 ("The Revolution of the Word") and claimed for *transition* a priority in formulating the problem on an international plane, in developing it independently, and in giving it a systematic dialectical substructure. "I based myself," Jolas states, "primarily on a study of Freud's, Jung's, Levy Bruhl's explorations into the unconscious in order to discover the laws dominating the mutation of language."[34]

The genius of Joyce gave to the movement a power that the smaller talents of Dada never had it in them to impart; and *transition* served him, and it, well. By 1928 such smaller fry as A. Lincoln Gillespie Jr in English and George Pelorson and Camille Schuwer in French wrote more or less successfully in the newspeak. Henri Michaux and Raymond Queneau took from it what they wanted. They could not carry it further, and their sensitiveness (or sense) suggested a retreat from it. Today the idea has become curiously vulgarized and its chief representative is, I suppose, Anthony Burgess. But Earwicker and his sons were father-founders of civilization: the hero of *A Clockwork Orange* (1960) is just a violently destructive apeman, or orang(e).

A poet of (I think) greater genius than Stein seems in those years to have echoed Dada and, perhaps through Dada, Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, rather than Joyce: e.e. cummings (1894–1962), the most gifted in the English language of that descent. Take the first of the *95 Poems* (1950):

l(a
le
af
fa
ll
s)
one
l
iness.

The initial *l*, which starts the flow (or rather flight or flutter) of the poem, connects beyond the parenthesis with the three last lines. The form is completely synthetic, loneliness is forcibly embodied, caught, wrapped in the falling leaf. And cummings need not, like Gertrude Stein, wink at the reader as if to say: "Look at my arrangement!" Yet how fine it is: this *le/af/fa* tercet, with the phonic symmetry of *af* and *fa*, with, above, the two liquids, *l*, *le* and, below, the double liquid *ll*. Not *Lautdichtung*, not concrete poetry, but a very subtle *calligramme*.

The same patterning is to be found in poem 41:

Beautiful

is the
unmea
ning
of (sil

ently) fal

ling (e
ver
yw
here) s

Now.

The Joycean procedures are here replaced with similar effect by totally different ones. The separation of *s* and *now* means that the snow is Now, is part of the unmeaning and silent moment, of the absolute present.

Or again consider (with apology for the mutilation) the better part of poem 4:

this man's heart
. . .
. . . loves

nothing

as much as
how (first
the arri
-v-
in
-G) a snowflake twi-
sts
, on
its way to now
—here

where of course the last word is finally *nowhere*, but before that, before the flake dissolves into nothingness, it is *now here*, with again the same kind of ecstasy in awareness and contemplation of a visible, vividly emblemed movement in space-time. A near-oriental sensibility has found a delicate yet vigorous concrete expression. I have chosen very simple examples: for cummings's patterning to work effectively, a strong motor aspect seems to be required, to be completely conveyed by the emblem.

The use of the word "concrete" in these last remarks reminds me of the limit I prescribed myself: concrete poetry is another subject.

References

1. See FILIPPO MARINETTI, "Il primo manifesto de Futurismo," *Figaro* (Paris 1909), in which he glorifies the world-purifying character of war.
2. FILIPPO MARINETTI, *Zang Tumb Tuuumb Tuuuum* (Milan 1940), first published in 1914.
3. I owe everything here to Luda Schnitzer's Introduction to VELIMIR KHLEBNIKOV, *Choix de poèmes* (Honfleur 1967). See also ROMAN JACOBSON, *Étude sur la poésie russe moderne* (Paris 1921), which centres on the work of Khlebnikov.

4. ERNEST HEMINGWAY, *A Farewell to Arms* (paperback: Harmondsworth 1970), Ch. XXVII.
5. HUGO BALL, *Briefe* (Zurich/Cologne 1957), 23 June 1916.
6. *ibid.*
7. FRANK BUDGEN, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (London 1934), p. 20.
8. WALTON LITZ, *The Art of James Joyce* (London 1961).
9. JAMES JOYCE, *Ulysses* (paperback: Harmondsworth 1971), p. 50.
10. *ibid.*, p. 55.
11. *ibid.*, p. 119.
12. *ibid.*, p. 123.
13. *ibid.*, p. 287.
14. *ibid.*, pp. 586–658.
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17. *ibid.*, p. 478.
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19. *ibid.*, pp. 153 and 167.
20. JAMES JOYCE, *Finnegans Wake* (London 1939), p. 16.
21. *ibid.*, p. 455.
22. *ibid.*, p. 415.
23. *ibid.*, pp. 196–216.
24. *ibid.*, p. 283.
25. *ibid.*, p. 297.
26. CLIVE HART, *Structure and Motif in "Finnegans Wake"* (London 1962).
27. B. J. TYSDAHL, *Joyce and Ibsen* (Oslo and New York 1968), Appendix, p. 229.
28. C.-P. BAUDELAIRE, *Les fleurs du mal* (1857).
29. SAMUEL BECKETT, "Whoroscope" (1935), in *Poems in English* (paperback: London 1969).
30. *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by Stuart Gilbert (New York 1957), p. 237.
31. DONALD SUTHERLAND, *Gertrude Stein: a Biography of Her Work* (New Haven, Conn. 1951).
32. EDMUND WILSON, *Axel's Castle* (New York 1936), pp. 242–3.
33. MARCEL JOUSSE, "Études de psychologie linguistique: le style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les verbornoreurs," in *Archives de philosophie*, Vol. II, Cahier V (Paris 1925).
34. No consideration of *transition* can ignore the brilliant philosophical criticism of Carola Diedion Welcker, both on Joyce and on more general topics. A characteristic example is "Die Funktion der Sprache in der heutigen Dichtung" (The Role of Language in Contemporary Poetry) in *transition* 22.

CHAPTER 6

Language and Tradition

Robert A. Hall, Jr*

I

The 19th and 20th centuries have brought rapid and profound changes to European and other languages. At the root of these developments, perhaps the most important factor has been the continued rise of nationalism, as a result of which formerly unified areas have become politically fragmented and national languages have proliferated. Even where no political break-up has resulted, many populations have shown a desire to cultivate regional linguistic variations. In addition to these specifically centrifugal forces, there has been a marked increase in the number of speakers of many of the world's languages. Some languages (especially those of out-of-the-way, so-called "primitive" groups) have died out or become moribund; others have acquired a great number of new speakers, partly because some groups have abandoned their earlier languages in favour of another one, but mainly (especially in the mid-20th century) because of the population "explosion." Moreover, restrictive purism has been unable to restrain the growth of new dialectal variations, especially in the great "world languages" such as English and French, simply because there are more people speaking them. The net result has been a marked overall increase in the number and diversity of language standards—that is, the "officially" approved forms of particular languages.

Together with these changes in modern speech communities, there have been equally far-reaching changes in the relationship between the producers of literature and their community and language. With the disappearance, during the 19th century, of the old system of princely patronage, both the support and the dependence it entailed almost disappeared. The aristocratic public of the 17th and 18th centuries was schooled to expect and to appreciate delicate nuances in the use of a relatively uniform and restricted literary language. The modern general public, on the other hand, is both less demanding and less well-trained in such matters. Writers have reacted to this in one of two ways: they have either accepted it and conformed in their usage to current taste (as is inevitable for those who write commercially for popular consumption), or they have deliberately restricted their audiences to small, highly selected groups formed at least partly on the basis of unusual sensitivity in response to the handling of language.

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* Professor of Linguistics, Cornell University.

II

At the end of the 18th century the situation of the standard languages and their tradition was relatively simple. Latin was still widely taught in schools, especially in Roman Catholic countries, and formed the basis of a humanistic education; but Greek had already begun to decline from the position of virtual equality it had enjoyed with Latin during the Renaissance. Among modern languages, only four enjoyed widespread recognition as vehicles of prestigious literature and culture: Italian, French, Spanish, and English. A fifth, German, had achieved prominence only during the 18th century.[1] Of the other languages of western Europe, some had in the past had a more active literary tradition—for instance, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, Catalan, Portuguese, Hungarian, Polish, Russian—but by this time their standing had declined. Provençal (South French) had, in fact, been the first Romance language in which poetry had been written during the Middle Ages; but, in spite of the short-lived popularity of a superficial imitation in the mid-18th-century lyrics of the "genre troubadour," Provençal was no longer anything but a congeries of local dialects. Regional speech was remarkably varied, even in France, where the persistence of the *ancien régime* had (in its enemies' view) been accompanied by deliberate encouragement of local dialects as a divisive factor in popular culture. Dialects enjoyed little literary or social prestige, however; and, if used for literature at all, they were considered suitable only for slight, mainly humorous pieces.

It was widely held that, to be a great vehicle of literature and culture, a language had to meet certain requirements. The first of these was its use by outstanding authors. At the end of the 18th century, little or nothing was known of the mediaeval vernacular literatures in France or England. Italian was considered to have the oldest literary tradition, beginning with Petrarch and Boccaccio; other countries followed: Spain with Lope de Vega, Calderón, and Cervantes; France with Corneille, Molière, Racine, and the others of the "siècle de Louis XIV"; and England with Shakespeare, Dryden, and Pope. (Dante and Milton were both "irregular," in the neo-classical view, and their status was therefore doubtful.) The language must also be as demonstrably reducible to rule as are Latin and Greek, and by the same criteria. Hence the repeated efforts, dating from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, to write grammars for the modern tongues, cast in a Latinizing mould, which culminated in Lancelot and Arnauld's unsound but prestigious "universal grammar," the *Grammaire de Port-Royal* (1660). By the end of the 18th century, a sizable body of grammatical tradition had been built up for each of the major European languages, with grammars aimed primarily at setting norms for upper-class speech and literary usage. The grammarians' major clientele was the rising middle class, who needed instruction for themselves and their children in linguistic as well as other aspects of elegant behaviour. (M. Jourdain in Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* is a comic exaggeration, but his situation was that of thousands of other social climbers in 17th-century France and 18th-century England.)

But who was to set the norm? It was no accident that the drive toward normative grammar was a concomitant of the "authoritarian reaction" of the late 16th and 17th centuries. Rulers bent on enforcing uniformity and obedience in all fields (politics, religion, culture) naturally included language among the types of behaviour to be regulated. The means of so doing were at hand in the academies, the institutionalized outgrowth of 16th-century discussion groups. The first language academy to be founded had been the Florentine Accademia della Crusca or "Bran Academy" (its task was to separate the linguistic grain from the bran), set up by Duke Cosimo de' Medici in 1546. It was followed in 1635 by the Académie Française, established by Cardinal Richelieu as part of his centralized totalitarian rule over all French life; and in 1714 by the Real Academia Española. The task of an academy was to establish grammatical and literary norms by which usage and literary performance might be evaluated. Linguistically these norms were customarily embodied in an official academy dictionary and grammar, the former usually appearing long before the latter, and showing considerably more competence, although generally puristic in intent and founded on a narrowly chosen corpus of not wholly representative texts.

In two major countries—England and Germany—no academy came into being. In the case of the latter, the political disunity of the country, coupled with the lateness of the language in emerging as an acknowledged literary medium, is perhaps sufficient explanation. It has been harder for historians to explain the absence of an academy in England, in spite of repeated calls for one throughout the 18th century. English independence of spirit, commercialism, and "do-it-yourself" outlook on cultural matters have all been suggested as countervailing forces. At all events, the field was open for the unofficial canonization of "the grammar-book" and especially "the dictionary" as lawgivers, with too little attention given to the qualifications of their authors. In England, Dr Johnson's great though idiosyncratic *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was supreme for a century or more; in America, its place was taken by Noah Webster's more democratic, but no more liberal and equally authoritarian, work, which was first published in 1828.

The linguistic and literary ideals of 17th- and 18th-century neo-Classicism could be aspired to only by a socially and politically established elite with enough leisure to learn and practise the special variety of language prescribed by puristic norms. Inevitably the social and political upheavals that began with the French Revolution engendered changes in both popular and learned attitudes toward language itself, as did also new developments in literary taste. In France and America an immediate result of democratization was to foment a desire to make the benefits of "correct" language available to everyone. The French Revolution began the work of eradicating dialects through the spread of the standard language, which continued—with the massive support given by universal education—throughout the 19th century. A similar process went on in America, where school-marms preached the gospel of "good English," and Webster's dictionary came to occupy a position of authority second only to the Bible in many schools and homes. In other countries, where democratization was slower, dialectal diversity, especially in rustic speech, persisted much longer.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the great problem facing theoreticians of the major languages was that of neologism. Innovations, whether by new formation from the existing lexical stock of a language or by borrowing from other languages, were in general frowned upon by purists. This attitude was due in part to nationalistic feeling, in opposition to currents of foreign influence (as in the anti-Gallicism of the Italian Gian Francesco Galeani Napione), and in part to general conservatism (as manifested by one of Sir Walter Scott's characters, who says: "The trouble with the world nowadays, Sir, is that there are too many demmed new words!"). In spite of the opposition of purists, however, innovations continued to become established, as they had done ever since the Middle Ages. Borrowing among the various European languages usually followed the fashions of cultural influence, with Spanish as a major source in the late 16th and early 17th centuries; French in the late 17th and in the 18th; and English, beginning with the mid-18th-century "Anglomania" and continuing today. Latin and Greek were, at all times, in the background as a reservoir for both humanistic and scientific neologisms.

The major semantic fields of lexical innovation in the early 19th century were science and technology. In the physical sciences, new formations on Graeco-Latin bases were quite common (e.g. *catalysis*, *electrode*). In applied science and technology, not only Latin and Greek loans, but also intra-systemic new formation and inter-language borrowing became more and more widespread as the rate of development increased. Each country was most influential in the fields in which its technological innovations predominated, England above all others. In France, for instance, an abortive local development of railways in the 1780s had been accompanied by a basically indigenous terminology, e.g. *ornière*, "rut" > "rail."[2] In the 1830s, both the railway and the accompanying terms were developed afresh in France, this time through imitation of English models, with lexical borrowings such as *rail*, *locomotive*, *tender*, *wagon*. In many other fields, too, English was the dominant source-language for new terms in French, e.g. carriage types (*tilbury*, *brougham*), sanitary installations (*water-closet*, often abbreviated to *water* or *w.c.*), parliamentary and judiciary institutions (*speech*, *jury*), and recreation (*sport*, *cricket*, *golf*).

Such innovations were usually accepted without much opposition by the man in the street (unsophisticated speakers normally adopt useful neologisms with little or no objection) and by writers of scientific and technical treatises. In *belles-lettres*, however, neo-classical purism endured well into the 19th century, and in some countries (especially France, but also Italy, Spain, and Spanish America) it has never really died out. The furore that arose in France in 1820 over the use of the "common" word *mouchoir* (handkerchief) in Pierre Antoine Lebrun's *Marie Stuart* was only one of a number of instances of finicky purism. The definitive break with neo-classical restraints, in vocabulary as in literary form, came with the Romantic movement, which opened the flood-gates to lexical innovation in the 1820s and 1830s. Thenceforth, words from all kinds of sources, but especially localisms (e.g. Scots English *unco' guid*; South French *farandole*, *bouillabaisse*), slang (e.g. Eng. *cab*, *pub*, *bus*), and archaisms (Eng. *eftsoons*, *I wis*; Fr. *antan* ["yester-year"]) became more and more frequent in literature. Of the various literary genres, prose narrative was more open to lexical innovation than lyric or narrative poetry, or even the drama, during the Romantic period.

Romantic desire for "local colour" and later insistence on exact reproduction of actual speech began to break down earlier barriers between standard languages and dialect in literature. Not only individual words but also complete utterances in dialect came to be included in literature, at first as direct reproduction of dialogue. The leader in this respect was Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), who made extensive use of "braid Scots" in his novels set in Scotland, such as *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) and *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), not only for quaintness or humour, but also to heighten the emotional tension at points of climax. Scott's example was followed (at first rather timidly) in other countries—in France, for instance, by George Sand in *François le champi* (1847–8). In countries with an ultra-conservative literary tradition, such as Italy, puristic pressures were strong enough to inhibit the use of dialect in the Romantic period. Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) made no use of dialect in his tone-setting novel *I promessi sposi* (1821–7; The Betrothed); in fact, when he revised the novel for its definitive version (1840–2), Manzoni deliberately excised words and expressions that might seem too close to Lombard dialect, replacing them with "purer" (though often less appropriate) Tuscanisms.

The new nationalism, a legacy of the Napoleonic epoch, was exacerbated by post-Napoleonic reactionary governments and their repressive policies. It found linguistic expression chiefly in renewed attention to and development of hitherto neglected or underdeveloped national tongues. The theoretical justification for this emphasis was the supposed relation between nation and language, the latter being regarded as an expression of the spirit of the former: one of the hallmarks of a speech community aspiring to independent nationhood was the development of a separate language of its own. Hence the 19th century witnessed the multiplication of standard literary languages on the basis of earlier, now obsolescent languages in some instances, and of less prestigious local dialects in others. Major movements toward the development of new standard languages took place first in three relatively backward countries of Europe: Greece, Serbia, and Norway.

As Haugen has pointed out, "it appears to be almost the rule that such movements can be traced back to a single devoted person who gave focus to the prevailing dissatisfactions of his people."[3] In Greece, this devoted person was the linguistic reformer Alexander Koraes (1748–1833). Even before the end of the 18th century, Koraes had begun his campaign to establish a norm for modern Greek usage. Basing his prescriptions on the academic and religious variety of the language (which was as close as possible to ancient and especially New Testament Greek), he set up an extremely conservative, archaizing ideal. The resultant variety of Greek came to be called the *katharēvousa* (purified language) as opposed to the *demotikē* (folk-speech). In the *katharēvousa*, foreign loan-words were to be eliminated and replaced by indigenous terms based upon classical Greek. The adoption of this "purified" language by the Greek upper classes and intellectuals led to what is now termed "diglossia,"[4] a condition in which two closely related varieties of the same language compete for the allegiance of the members of a speech-community.

A generation later, in what is now Yugoslavia, the language reformer Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) took a different approach to linguistic problems. Instead of the Old Church Slavonic language, he advocated, in his *Grammar of the Serbian Language* (1814) and his *Serbian Dictionary* (1818), a standard based on folk-speech—precisely the opposite position to that of Koraes in his Greek reforms. In 1850 Karadžić adapted his Serbian standard to fit Croatian speech as well. Modern Serbo-Croatian, therefore, even though it has two orthographies (one using the Roman alphabet and the other the Cyrillic), is not split, like Greek, along dialectal or social lines, and so Yugoslavia has remained free of diglossia.

Neither in Greece nor in Serbia was there an already dominant, relatively modern standard against which the ideal proposed by the language reformers had to contend. In Norway, however, the Dano-Norwegian literary language had been well established for four centuries, during the period of dynastic union with Denmark. By 1814, when Norway was separated from Denmark and became nominally independent (though united with Sweden under one crown), Dano-Norwegian was the language of the conservative, educated upper classes, but was far from corresponding to popular Norwegian speech. Pure Danish was used by very few people; urban and rustic dialects, though authentically Norwegian, were extensively differentiated; and the Dano-Norwegian of the educated was an uneasy compromise over a range of dialectal substrata. Norway's first great poet and nationalist, Henrik Wergeland (1807–45), called for an independent national language in his essay "On Norwegian language liberation" (1835). To establish such an independent Norwegian one language reformer, Knud Knudsen (1812-56), proposed a gradual modification of Danish spelling in the direction of nationwide Norwegian pronunciation, beginning with his *Haandbog i dansk-norsk sproglære* (1856; Handbook of Dano-Norwegian Grammar). A more radical solution was favoured by a country schoolmaster, Ivar Aasen (1812–96), whose ideal *landsmål*, or country-wide language, was to be a combination of features of various Norwegian dialects, first presented in his *Det norske folkesprogs grammatik* (1848; Grammar of Norwegian Folk-Speech) and *Ordbok over det norske folkesprog* (1850; Dictionary of Norwegian Folk-Speech), and modified only slightly in later publications. Aasen's *landsmål* ideal, for which he fought strenuously, became a focus of bitter controversy in 19th- and 20th-century Norway, which has consequently suffered a diglossic split even deeper than that in Greece.[5]

Among other languages whose resurgence in the 19th century was connected with nationalist or separatist movements were Rumanian, Catalan, and Erse. Rumanian had had little literary cultivation until the late 18th century. A change in orthography from Cyrillic to Roman letters (based on a recognition of the Romance and Latin origin of Rumanian), initiated in this period by a group of writers known as the "Transylvanian school," was symptomatic of a growing national awareness that culminated in Rumanian independence in 1861 and the rise of a number of important authors such as Ion Heliade Rădulescu (1802–71) and Vasile Alecsandri (1819–90). Catalan, which had been extensively used as a literary language in the late Middle Ages but had remained relatively uncultivated since then, was the everyday language of country and city folk alike. Its literary resurgence dates from the late 18th century, with the historian Antonio de Capmany (1742–1819) and the poets of the Romantic period, beginning with Manuel de Cabanyes (1808–33). During the last 150 years its official standing has risen and fallen together with the greater or lesser autonomy of Catalonia in the political organization of Spain. Erse was in a much less favourable position than Rumanian and Catalan because it had been fighting a losing battle against the dominant standard, English, for several hundred years. By the middle of the 19th century, Erse was used for ordinary communication by only a relatively small number of Irish peasants, especially after the spectacular fall in population owing to the potato famine of 1846–7. The revival of Erse was almost exclusively the work of literary and political nationalists and had far less popular support than any other resurgent national language.

III

Not all the new literary standard languages of the 19th century were associated with nationalistic movements. One of the best-known, because the most spectacular, of the mid-century revivals was that of Provençal, which in a few decades regained much of its mediaeval literary and cultural prestige. This revival was due to a small but determined group of writers, the Félibrige, and especially to its leader, Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914). With his romantic idyll *Mirèio* (1853; Mireille) and other poems, Mistral aroused the admiration not only of his fellow-Provençals but of the entire French literary world. Unlike the mediaeval Provençal literary language, however, the language used by Mistral was not a *landsmål*-like mixture of dialects, but was based on his own Rhodanian speech of Arles and the Bouches-du-Rhône region. This had no effect on the popularity of Mistral with the French-speaking public, but it proved an obstacle to the spread of modern Provençal, as a literary language, to other parts of southern France, whose dialects were by this time markedly divergent. Furthermore, standard French remained the only channel of communication available for social, intellectual, and political advancement in the country as a whole, with its strongly centralized regime and effective control exercised from Paris. Hence the Félibrige movement, although it restored prestige to Provençal and began a literary revival that has lasted—with ups and downs—to the present, did not succeed in replacing French for any but purely literary purposes.

In the German-speaking area, two major regional varieties began to be cultivated for literary purposes during the 19th century: Plattdeutsch (Low German), especially in the metropolitan centre of Hamburg; and Alemannic, especially Schwyzerdütsch (Swiss German), in its several sub-dialects. "Platt" claimed attention for a time mainly because of two outstanding authors: Klaus Groth (1819–99), with his collection of poems, *Quickborn* (1852; Living Fount), and his stories, *Vertelln* (1855–60; Tales); and Fritz Reuter (1810–74), especially in his historical novel *Ut de Franzosentid* (1862; From the Time of the French War) and his autobiographical tales *Ut mine Festungstid* (1862; From My Time in Prison) and *Ut mine Stromtid* (1862–3; From My Farming Days). Both before and after German unification in 1870, however, centripetal pressures in the Reich (although not as powerful as in France) were strong enough to overcome any local appeal that "Platt" or other dialects might have had as literary media. German-speaking Switzerland's political independence and its people's strong attachment to their local characteristics, including speech-patterns, created a diglossic situation that has lasted to the present, with High German as a semi-foreign, semi-learned language used for literature, journalism, official documents, and in intercourse with outsiders, and the various dialects of Schwyzerdütsch serving for everyday contacts on all social and intellectual levels. Swiss local particularism has been an obstacle, however, to the recognition of any one variety of Swiss German as a standard. Hence the dialectal works of such Swiss-German authors as the Zürichers August Corrodi (1826–85) and Heinrich Leuthold (1827–79) and the Schaffhauser Arnold Ott (1840–1910) have had a purely local appeal and have remained little known outside their home territory. In Austria, likewise, the regional dialects have served as literary media for only a few minor poets, such as Franz Stelzhamer (1802–74).

In less central areas, too, the 19th century brought new ferment to European languages. On the frontiers of both North and South America, new ways of life were accompanied by lexical and structural innovations in speech, with loan-words from indigenous languages (e.g. Algonquian *moccasin*, *wigwam*, *squaw* in English) and with peculiarities in morphology (such as *tuck*, took; *snuck*, sneaked; *boughten*, bought) and phonology (as in American Spanish *seseo* and *yeismo*, i.e. pronouncing *ciento* [a hundred] as "siento," and *calle* [street] as "caye"). Although speakers from England, Spain, or Portugal might regard these and similar practices as undignified or inelegant, their users soon came to consider them part and parcel of their own particular way of living. Hence their use was indispensable for an accurate portrayal of the conditions prevailing in the Americas. Even James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851), although using literary, even pompous, English in his narration, puts slightly dialectal speech into the mouth of, say, Natty Bumppo. In the early 19th century, American humorists made frequent use of dialectal forms; mis-spellings and "eye-dialect,"* especially, were the stock-in-trade of "Artemus Ward" (Charles F. Browne, 1834–87) and others. Even James Russell Lowell (1819–91) in his *Bigelow Papers* (1848, 1867) and Sidney Lanier (1842–81) used dialect in witty, commonsense passages that went beyond mere provincial humour.

With the entry into literature of uneducated and under-privileged characters such as Negroes and low-class whites, the problem of representing their speech accurately became acute. At first, as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96), the completely untutored speech of the slaves was represented rather timidly in a partial, conventionalized way. It remained for Mark Twain (1835–1910) to achieve a much more complete and careful discrimination among subtly differing varieties of local speech. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1896), the narration is in standard English, but the dialogue is in accurately reproduced Missouri dialect. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) reverses the situation, presenting Huck's first-person narration in his non-standard speech, but reporting conversation in other varieties as well, including standard English; with *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain became the first writer to bridge effectively the gap between dialect and literary language. Thereafter the barrier between formal standard literary usage and all other functional varieties (including non- or sub-standard speech) largely disappeared from North American English. Negro speech, especially, has been reproduced with as much accuracy as the conventions of English orthography will allow, from the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908) onward.

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* The spelling of a word in such a way as to give a representation of its pronunciation that is accurate but orthographically "incorrect," e.g. *vittles* for "victuals" or *wimmin* for "women." The implication of such spelling is to tell the reader "the person in whose mouth this word is put is such that, if an incorrect pronunciation of the word existed, he or she would use it."

In South America, a similar problem faced the author who portrayed the life of the frontiersman, especially the *gaucho* or cow-man of the Argentinian pampas and the Brazilian plains. In the *literatura gauchesca* that arose in the middle and late 19th century portraying this typical figure, his speech was represented in a conventionalized, stylized manner, not shying away, however, from non-standard features of phonology, morphosyntactic structure, or lexicon. The best-known work dealing with the *gaucho* is the long, quasi-epic poem *Martín Fierro* (1872) of José Hernández (1834–91), who used the same technique as Twain did in *Huckleberry Finn*, telling the story through the hero in his native rustic Argentinian Spanish. In Brazil, João Simões Lopes Neto (1865–1916) portrayed a similar environment in his *Contos gauchescos* (1912; Gaucho Tales), with standard-language narration and dialectal conversation. The *sertões* or back-lands of Brazil were portrayed by Euclydes da Cunha (1866–1909) in his historical reportage *Os sertões* (1902; Rebellion in the Back-lands), in standard Brazilian Portuguese but with a profusion of local terminology.

IV

From the middle of the 19th century onward, the pursuit of realism led to further introduction of non-standard dialogue in prose narrative and drama. To a large extent, mid- and late-19th-century realism was allied with regionalism—for example, in the *Heimatkunst* movement in Germany and *costumbrismo** in Spain. The extent to which dialect was used in realist-regionalist works varied markedly from one country to another. In Germany, for instance, Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946) used Silesian in the dialogue of such dramas as *Die Weber* (1892; The Weavers); in England, the characters of Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) make extensive use of their "Wessex" dialect. At the opposite extreme, in France, the characters of the naturalistic novels of Émile Zola (1840–1900) use virtually no dialect in their conversations; nor do those of the Italian realists Giovanni Verga (1840–1922), Matilde Serao (1856–1917), or Grazia Deledda (1875–1936), although their stories deal respectively with Sicily, Naples, and Sardinia—regions in which everyday speech has a strong dialectal colouring. The only major Italian author of this period to introduce regional speech extensively in the dialogue of his stories was Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911). In his *Piccolo mondo antico* (1896; Little World of Yester-Year) and *Piccolo mondo moderno* (1901; Little World of Nowadays) Fogazzaro used Venetian and Lombard dialect much as Scott had used "braid Scots"—for local colour, humour, and intensification of emotional effect. Even so, Fogazzaro was strongly criticized for "impurity" in having dared to put non-standard speech into his characters' mouths, and Verga was praised for having restricted his Sicilianisms to italianized versions of dialectal idiomatic expressions and syntactic constructions. Purely dialectal literature—of which the Roman satirist G. G. Belli (1791–1863) was the greatest exponent—remained, therefore, almost wholly isolated from the mainstream of Italian national literature in the 19th century.

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* See Vol. V, "Naturalism and the Spanish Novel."

Throughout the century, the structure of the major literary languages, as represented in their respective orthographies and as used in literature, changed remarkably little. Such phonological changes as did take place in received pronunciation (e.g. Fr./*l̡*/ > /j/, or/ œ̃ / > /ẽ/) received virtually no recognition in orthography, and morpho-syntactic change was restricted to the rise of a few alternative forms or constructions (e.g. Eng. *dove* ~ *dived*). The beginnings of change in the standard languages themselves appear toward the end of the century, first in stylistic matters, then in syntax and word-formation. Thus, Henry James (1845–1916) used a highly formal standard English, complicated primarily by extensive structures of modification in nominal and verbal phrases. Similarly, the stylistic innovations of Marcel Proust (1871–1922) consist only in the use of considerably longer sentences, with more involved clause-structure, than were considered normal for French prose in his time. With the Futurist movement, founded by Filippo Marinetti in 1909, the revolt against inherited form reached farther down into the core of linguistic structure than before, involving not only the relative frequency of complicated constructions but basic syntactic relations as well. The more radical writings of Marinetti (1878–1944)—such as *La battaglia d'Adrianopoli* (The Battle of Adrianopolis) and *Zang Tumb Tuuumb Tuuuum* (both 1914), reporting warfare in the Balkans—seem at first glance to incorporate a complete rejection of all conventional use of language, as do those of the Dadaists such as Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) in France during the years following World War I, and their later imitators.

Yet a closer examination reveals that not even the Futurists and Dadaists made a complete break with all convention; a certain degree of comprehensibility was always maintained, even if some clarity was sacrificed (for emotional effect) by omission or distortion at certain levels of linguistic structure.* Common to most experimentalists were an extreme use of fragmentary sentences and an intentional disregard of orthographical convention. Disconnected phrases or single words brought an author's presentation of his subject-matter much closer to ordinary conversation and to the unuttered monologue we all carry on throughout our waking hours. Similarly, the omission of such features as punctuation and capital letters produces an effect of uninterrupted flow—though when such experiment was converted by a few (such as e.e. cummings) into a regular habit, it declined into mere mannerism. Semantic incongruity—for the shock value of a highly unexpected message—was a stock resource of all experimentalists.

On the other hand, there was considerable variation in the use by different writers of other features of the available linguistic resources. On the phonological level, for instance, both Marinetti and James Joyce (1882–1941) made considerable use of interjection-like or onomatopœic combinations, making such formations as Marinetti's "tam-tuumb" (describing the crunch of shells) or Joyce's "Fff. Oo. Rpr....Pprrffrrppff" in *Ulysses* (1922). In syntax Marinetti freed his verbs from the person, number, and tense references inherent in the Italian inflexional system by using only the infinitive; but, although he proclaimed as one of his aims the elimination of adjectives and adverbs, he used both (less often, however, than was then customary in "elegant" style, especially the rhetorical grandiosity of D'Annunzio and his imitators). Joyce's syntax was much more complicated than that of, say, Marinetti; his greatest idiosyncrasy lay, rather, in his fondness for unusual words: borrowings from a great number of foreign languages, and especially the compression of two or more English words into one.†

Of course, these and similar departures from the conventions of the major standard languages did not immediately produce a revolution in literary usage. The reaction of many conservative *littérateurs* and of most laymen ranged from amusement to distaste and hostility. Many younger authors (such as the Italian Aldo Palazzeschi and the American John Dos Passos) toyed with futurist or dadaist techniques for a while, only to return later to a more traditional use of language. Yet the anti-traditionalism of the experimentalists left its traces in a generally freer approach to the use of language. The road was thus opened for, say, the semi-automatism in verbal repetition that characterizes the poetry of Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), the precious, *recherché* vocabulary of William Faulkner (1897–1962), and the extensive loan-translations from Italian (in both vocabulary and syntax) that characterize Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1939).

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* See Ch. 5, "Experiments in Creative Language."

† See Ch. 5, "Experiments in Creative Language," and Vol. V, "Writer and Reader: a New Relationship."

V

The re-drawing of the map of Europe after World War I brought with it several new nations (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Finland) and the relocation of many frontiers. As a consequence, many a region had a different official language from the one it had had before the war. In some cases, the new official language was that of the region's inhabitants, as in the region of Trento (Italy) and in the nations mentioned above. In others, it was an alien tongue, as in the German-speaking Alto Adige (the old South Tyrol) and Sudetenland (with Italian and Czech, respectively, as the new official language), or in Finland, where for the Swedish-speaking part of the population Finnish took the place of German as the dominant language. In some regions, such as Istria (now in north-western Yugoslavia) and the Polish Corridor, the urban population spoke one language (in these instances, Italian and German respectively) and the rural inhabitants another (Croatian and Polish respectively). The guarantees given to language minorities under the post-war treaties failed to prevent either hostility between rival speech communities or repressive policies (such as those of the Italian fascist government toward the Tyrolean Austrians). On linguistic grounds, the fascist and nazi governments laid nationalistic claims to parts of other countries: Italy to Corsica, Nice, and Italian- and Romansh-speaking Switzerland; and Germany to the Sudetenland, the Polish Corridor, German-speaking Switzerland, and Austria. Hungarian-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania were the objects of similar claims by Hungary. It was to defend its territory against such claims that Switzerland, in 1939, declared Romansh a fourth national language, in spite of its small number of speakers and the virtual absence of a prestigious literature.

In several countries that suffered from diglossia, and especially in

Norway and Greece, the split between supporters of rival standards became deeper during the first half of the 20th century. Factors other than those of literary tradition came to play a critical role. For instance, with growing urbanization, the tone-setting popular speech in Norway came to be that of Oslo and its suburbs rather than that of the country districts. New awareness of social conflicts, especially that between bourgeoisie and workers, came to influence speakers' sympathies—usually, in Norway, toward *riksmål* on the middle- and upper-class side. After considerable debate, new names were adopted for the two competing varieties of Norwegian in 1928, with results that were wholly satisfactory to no one: *riksmål* was renamed *bokmål* (book-language) and *landsmål* became *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian). The situation was further complicated by two orthographical reforms, in 1917 and 1938, each of which introduced certain obligatory and certain optional changes for the spelling of both *bokmål* and *Nynorsk*. The upshot was that by 1940 a chaotic situation had arisen, with several criteria for variation (lexical, morpho-syntactic, phonological, orthographical), which merely encouraged scholarly disagreement, often over very minor points.[6] Matters were not improved by widespread confusion among most people (including many serious writers) between the language as spoken and its orthography, and between the structure of the language and stylistic variations in its use.

In Greece, also, the diglossic split deepened between the wars.[7] The *demotikē* made gains in everyday usage and in literature; but the *katharēvousa* became more deeply entrenched as the official language of state, Church, and school. The major foreign influence was French, as a result of which a great many loan-words entered the *demotikē*, such as *saison* (season), *rhekor* (record), and *rhesital* (recital); loan-translations of words and phrases were also common—*sidērodromos* (railway; lit. "iron course," from Fr. *chemin de fer*). Intense hostility to such popular innovations, often considered to be vulgarisms, separated not only social classes but even, on occasion, the members of families.* In both Norway and Greece, the debates assumed the status of a national family quarrel, fought with extreme bitterness but regarded as a local affair in which the intervention of even the best-intentioned outsiders was resented.

New standard languages continued to rise, or to gain supporters, during the period between the wars. The Soviet Union's policy of "cultural autonomy" led to the literary use of many of its minority languages, such as Ukrainian. Minor separatist movements tended to exaggerate the regional linguistic differences in some countries (e.g. that between Croatian and Serbian in Yugoslavia, or between Slovak and Czech in Czechoslovakia); these movements played temporarily into the hands of German or Italian quislings during World War II (for instance Ante Pavelić in the puppet state of Croatia, 1941–5). The fascist government in Italy, although repressive in many of its policies, was enlightened enough to adopt the proposal of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile to teach standard Italian through the local dialects, if these differed so widely from the literary language as to be incomprehensible. As a result, there was a revival of literary activity in many dialects, as in that of Rome, where the satirist Trilussa (Carlo Alberto Sallustri, 1871–1950) continued the tradition of G. G. Belli. Friulian, a Rhaeto-Romance variety spoken in the Tagliamento valley (north-east of Venice), also experienced a literary renaissance.[8]

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* A Greek-speaking colleague recalls that when he, as a young man with a new-found sympathy for the proletariat, once dared to write to his father in *demotikē*, the latter was furious and replied (in *katharēvousa*, of course) threatening to disown him should the performance ever be repeated.

Even what had previously been regarded as "non-languages" (such as that of the despised Creoles of English or French origin) and "dead" languages began to show remarkable vitality in new or renewed use. Haitian Creole and related languages of the Caribbean, for instance, had previously been regarded as suitable only for "oral literature" or humorous columns in newspapers. The Haitian author Georges Sylvain was the first to confer literary dignity, in popular esteem, upon Creole with his verse re-tellings of traditional fables (not La Fontaine's, as is often said) in 1929. Cornish had been reckoned among the dead languages, since it had lost its last native speaker in the late 18th century. It has continued to be used, however, as a second language in direct transmission from one generation of speakers to the next, and in the 20th century has even experienced a certain revival in the learned meetings of the society An Dasserghyans Kernewek (The Revival of Cornish) and in the writings of Jenner and other authors.[9]

The further upheaval brought by World War II had many linguistic effects, both on existing standard languages and on many other languages and dialects. Such well-established speech communities as those of French and Italian underwent splits and changes in the accepted standard. Language problems figured largely in the upheavals that followed the dismantling of the European empires in Africa and elsewhere. The imperial powers had originally parcelled out Africa with scant regard for cultural patterns or the geography of speech communities, so that the old colonial frontiers (which were retained by the newly independent states) tended to cut across tribal and linguistic groupings.

The greatest single world-wide influence was that of English, especially the North American variety, following the United States' penetration into many fields, including technology, commerce, sport, amusements, and literature. Such Americanisms as the ubiquitous "O.K.," and a host of loan-words such as *propeller*, *battery*, and *knock-out*, spread into almost every part of the world. In literature, Hemingway, Faulkner, e.e. cummings, and other American authors had a strong influence, especially in Italy and Germany, where one of the cultural aims of fascist governments had been to diminish or nullify American influences. In some countries conservatives and xenophobes reacted puristically against the English invasion by serious or satirical counter-attacks—as did, for example, René Étiemble in *Parlez-vous franglais?* (1964).

A new influence, in addition to the familiar ones of technical borrowings and literary styles, was that of the sound-tracks of films. After World War II, the "neo-realist" movement—especially in the films of Italian directors such as Luchino Visconti and Vittorio de Sica—brought with it a new insistence on the use of such actual speech-forms, dialectal or urban, as might be appropriate in the mouths of their characters. (Where this is not done, in either a motion picture or a novel, the result is often impossibly stilted, as in the philosophical reflections Alberto Moravia [b. 1907] puts into the mouth of the prostitute-narrator in *La romana* [1947; The Woman of Rome], who speaks a refined, even *recherché*, standard Italian such as no Roman prostitute would use.) The realistic use of dialect in conversation has by now spread, even in Italy, from the cinema to the novel and the short story. Some authors, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–75), mix dialect and standard language to express class conflicts in accordance with Marxist theories. One novelist in particular, Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893–1973), has used a mixture of several dialects, crude Latinisms, and standard Italian—often shifting from one to another in the same sentence—to achieve an expressionistic, Joycean, stream-of-consciousness effect, in his *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957; That Awful Mess on Via Merulana).[10] In France, where argot has been established for centuries but, in general, strictly banned from *belles-lettres*, a strong shock was caused in 1960 by Raymond Queneau with his *Zazie dans le Métro*, which is crammed with teen-age slang.

By the mid-century many authors throughout the world had begun to use, in greater or lesser degree, "experimental" techniques of unconventional orthography, word-formation, syntax, or semantics. Earlier taboos against mixture of functional levels (formal and informal, standard and non-standard) and dialects had, if not wholly broken down, at least become much less widely observed than in earlier times. In serious writing, such mixture can create novel and unexpected juxtapositions that heighten the immediate emotional effect. Humour, likewise, benefits from sudden incongruous shifting of levels in the linguistic medium, as in the brilliant effects achieved by P. G. Wodehouse (1881–1975) with his kaleidoscopic variations against a background of "Augustan copper-plate," formal, standard English.[11]

On all levels of linguistic activity, literary and non-literary, in most of the old-established European languages, the former concentration of attention on the usage of one region or city as the exclusive norm (e.g. Paris, Florence, Madrid) has been replaced by a readiness to use regionalisms on an equal basis with accepted words or expressions. In modern Italian such terms as *intrallazzo* (tie-in deal—a war-time black-market borrowing from Sicilian), *fasullo* (fake, from Roman Jewish dialect), and *robiolina* (a kind of cheese, from Lombard) are three of many hundreds of former dialectalisms that have contributed to the marked "de-Tuscanization" of Italian. In view of the growing split between literary and non-literary usage in the established standard languages, one can by now speak of at least three major varieties: literary standard (often including various features previously regarded as eccentricities), non-literary standard, and non-standard.

The development of radio in the 1930s and of television in the 1950s led to ever more extensive use of non-literary varieties of language in many fields, especially those involving persuasion (e.g. advertising and politics). Whereas Mussolini, in the 1920s, had based his popular appeal on a flowery, often over-grandiose, D'Annunzian, literary Italian style, later demagogues, such as Hitler and the Louisiana politician Huey Long, based their oratorical styles on skilful use of non-standard speech and repetition of slogans and popular terms, often with new, carefully manipulated associations. Lenin, in 1919, used the slogan "All power to the Soviets" to justify his own seizure of absolute power; later, in both communist and fascist use, such terms as *democracy*, *socialism*, *patriotism*, and *reaction* acquired meanings that were markedly different from the meanings they normally had elsewhere in Europe and North America. In the 1960s, *genocide*—the extermination of an entire nation—was applied to programmes aimed at encouraging poverty-stricken women to avoid pregnancy by the use of birth-control methods; *ghetto* was extended to include any slum inhabited chiefly by Negroes; "police brutality" was often used to describe quite legitimate methods used by the police to prevent demonstrators from doing damage. Similarly, advertisers manipulated semantics to produce a desired response in prospective buyers—for instance, "Fluffo washes whiter" [than what?]; "Scientists [what scientists? how qualified?] have proven [how?] that Krunchy Krispies are better than 30 [which 30?] other breakfast foods."

Some conservative critics and purists, such as George Orwell,[12] have regarded such developments as "corruption" and "jargonization" of language. Linguistic scientists have countered this view by pointing out that semantic change is universal and unavoidable, and that changes such as these involve only a few words occurring in certain limited contexts. However, it is worth noting that two different types of semantic change are involved here. Normal shifts of meaning—for instance, Lat. *nescius*, ignorant > O. Fr. *nice*, silly > Eng. *nice*, affected > delicate > agreeable, likeable—take centuries to complete, are gradual and imperceptible, and, because they occur mainly outside of awareness, can never be halted. The type discussed in the preceding paragraph, however, is rapid, intentional, and involves a violent shift of reference initiated by small groups of more or less unscrupulous persons for the purpose of deceiving hearers or readers. It may be termed "semantic wrenching." Closely allied to this is "word shanghaiing," in which particular groups seize upon a term that has generally recognized favourable connotations and appropriate it for their own use; for instance, *liberal* as applied to themselves by ultra-radical groups. Objections to such semantic manipulation are justified in so far as it affects terms that are widely used (have a high text-frequency). It is greatly facilitated by the expansion of modern mass media, and the ordinary naive speaker of a language has little or no critical acumen or other defence against deceptions practised through semantic wrenching or word shanghaiing.

VI

In countries, such as Norway and Greece, with inherited rivalries between competing standards, the diglossia has begun to show signs of diminishing, if not of disappearing entirely. The rapid expansion of foreign, especially English, influence has led to a certain closing of ranks and de-emphasis of relatively minor differences in vocabulary and orthography. In Greece immediately after World War II it seemed for a time as if the *katharēvousa* was going to be identified almost exclusively with right-wing, and the *demotikē* with left-wing, political attitudes. More recently, however, the differences between the competing varieties have tended to disappear, and pure *katharēvousa* has become more and more restricted to the most formal, academic level.

In nations with newly established standard languages lacking a tradition of literary or official use, there has arisen much the same kind of problem as that which confronted the major languages of Europe in earlier centuries, especially during the Renaissance: the "defence of the language" against its already entrenched rivals; the discovery and establishment of norms, selected from competing regional and social varieties; and the coinage of new terminologies adequate to the discussion and teaching of modern technology.[13] Paradoxically, the language specialists of the new, often "underdeveloped" countries have called for prescriptive, normative measures for their linguistic development at a time when many analysts of language are reacting against outworn purism and academicism in the scholastic and literary tradition of Europe and the Americas (for instance, among the Caribbean Creoles[14]). In 1962, at the new Académie Créole in Haiti, one of several competing orthographies was established by law; and novels, poetry, and plays are being written in Creole in increasing numbers, especially by younger authors. In South Africa the Dutch-based Afrikaans has undergone rapid expansion in its use as an official and literary medium[15]—a nationalistic development accelerated by the country's cutting of its political ties with the British Commonwealth. Similarly, although not used as national languages, the Neo-Melanesian (Pidgin English) of New Guinea and the English-based Krio of Sierra Leone[16] and Sranan-Tongo of Surinam[17] have been developed for both literary and practical purposes.

By the 1970s the language situation throughout the world was considerably more complicated than ever before. It would be difficult to decide which aspects of the situation should be considered favourable, and which unfavourable. There are, at present, trends toward both simplification and complication of the linguistic situation throughout the world. The study and use of the "world languages" (English, French, and Russian, but especially the first) is increasing rapidly: it has been estimated that, by the year 2000, there will be two million teachers of English as a *second* language. Yet there is no likelihood that any one, or even all, of these will replace all the remaining languages of the earth. Those of small, isolated, powerless groups will continue to die out; but those of larger groups are likely to survive and even to increase in numbers of speakers and in standing, in proportion to the degree of autonomy (social, political, economic) their communities are able to sustain. Old linguistic splits (such as the Norwegian and Greek diglossias) will probably heal, partly or wholly; but new ones are continually arising, and the rate of their rise may even be increasing. In the last quarter of the century new antagonisms may arise on the basis of language differences between (say) speakers of English and French in Canada, or of Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay, or of Spanish and Quechua in Peru. Existing antagonisms may intensify in (say) India with its 14 national languages, including English; in the Maghreb (north-western Africa) between French and Arabic; or in Malaysia between Malay, Chinese, Hindi, and English. The outlook for linguistic unification is, on the whole, less bright than that for diversification. The extent to which diversity becomes divisive will depend not on the structural characteristics of the languages but on the non-linguistic attitudes, particularly group loyalty, of the communities involved.

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CHAPTER 7

English Literature and Society in the Early Twentieth Century

David Daiches*

I

A turning-point in attitudes to the nature of fiction was marked in 1919 when Virginia Woolf called H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy "materialists."[1] "Wells," she said, "is a materialist from sheer goodness of heart, taking on his shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by Government officials, and in the plethora of his ideas and facts scarcely having leisure to realise, or forgetting to think important, the crudity and coarseness of his human beings." But Wells (1866–1946) both realized and thought important the crudity and coarseness of his human beings; the argument might be turned the other way round, presenting Virginia Woolf as a novelist whose refining sensibility refused to recognize the importance of the ordinary thoughts and actions of ordinary people. Wells was a novelist of lower-middle-class origin who used the limited but real social mobility of his day to emancipate himself from his own class so as to enable himself to turn on it—from the outside, yet with deep inside knowledge—a cool sociological look. This was one side of his activity as a novelist, in which he draws on his own autobiography in depicting the lives and frustrated dreams of drapers' cowed assistants and small shop-keepers who are trapped by a class system that is shown as both very real and very cruel, from which only extraordinary good luck or extraordinary talent, or perhaps only a rare combination of both, could free them. In earlier literature there was always the Cinderella theme, exemplified in blatantly bourgeois form in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), in which the servant girl marries the squire; and there was also the suspicion of social climbers, to be found in

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* Professor of English, University of Sussex.

European literature at least since the Renaissance, which in the 19th century reveals itself in English literature (in Trollope, for example) as a suspicion of social mobility upward on the part of those who have already arrived. The gap between the social place claimed in respect of a character's acquisitions (financial or marital) and the habits of mind expected of him as a gentleman had been a problem for centuries: it was one of the problems Addison tried to solve in his *Spectator* essays in the early 18th century. When Mr Kipps, in Wells's novel *Kipps* (1905), inherits a fortune, his simple, untrained, lower-middle-class mind wrestles in vain with the problem of educating himself up to his new social situation. The difference, however, between Wells's treatment of such a theme and that in earlier fiction is that Wells sees the problem as exposing the fatuousness and futility—to say nothing of the cruelty—of the whole class system. Similarly, we find in Dickens and other 19th-century novelists an acute awareness of social injustice, but for the most part injustices can be remedied by greater kindness on the part of individuals. This is never true in Wells. And in Wells, although there is comic capital to be made out of the struggles of a member of a lower class to acquire the habits and conventions of a higher class, the laugh is on the higher class. The awkwardnesses and mystifications of the little man attempting to master the rules of "good society" expose the absurdity of those rules. Finally, and most important, Wells in his early sociological novels, as we might call them—they include (as well as *Kipps*) *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) and *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900)—sees not only sexual love but also the normal decencies of human affection conspiring *against* social liberation, because it requires a ruthless single-mindedness to enable someone trapped low in the class system to escape. In *Love and Mr Lewisham* it is compassion, affection, human decency, acting out their parts gropingly on a limited and frustrating stage, that lead the hero to give up his training as a scientist and to be content with a much more limited kind of life. In Dickens, on the other hand, these qualities in the end lead upward.

The characters in these novels certainly think and feel, but they are made to think and feel within the limitations imposed by their class and their pathetically limited education. Wells was so concerned with the ways in which society lays traps for human fulfilment and human dignity that he set himself at an early stage to expose those traps, and he could do so only by refusing to put his own sensibility at the disposal of his trapped characters. Indeed, it is interesting that time and time again Wells draws on the story of his own escape from lower-middle-class servitude as a draper's assistant through education into the free life of independently exercised intelligence, yet refuses to follow the character through to his own success, which he knew to be untypical. Virginia Woolf's charge of materialism, then, is really more important as illustrating her own view of fiction, which was aristocratic in that it sprang from the effortlessly educated sensibility of the emancipated and independent intelligence, than in defining Wells's.

Wells for his part asserted the claims of his kind of sociologically diagnostic novel in his attack on Henry James for his "tales of nothingness." "It is leviathan retrieving pebbles. It is a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea which has got into a corner of its den."[2] But Wells's interest was not merely sociological. He had escaped from his class prison through education in science, especially in biology, which remained his favourite subject all his life. Biology since Darwin had been concerned above all with *process*: we remember that it was Darwin's great interpreter T. H. Huxley whose lectures on biology Wells attended at the Normal School of Science, South Kensington. Society was an organization, but life was a process.

It was Wells's interest in science that enlarged his imagination and sent it beyond the sociological, the psychological, and the political (although he never lost interest in these) to imagine human affairs in the larger perspectives of immense technological advance or gigantic cosmic developments. At the same time the scientist could become for Wells (although he was not consistent in his view of him) a type of the classless intellectual who had found his way out of the class trap not by moving up but by moving out of the whole absurd system. Wells was not, however, a naive Victorian believer in progress. He knew that science was dangerous. The laws of science were impersonal, indifferent to human welfare; man himself had inherited animal instincts that rendered his handling of scientific knowledge highly problematical. In his science fiction Wells explored ways in which human personality, social organization, and scientific truth might interreact in determining man's destiny. It is this interrelationship between the human factors (sociological and psychological) and impersonal science that gives Wells's science fiction its special dimension. Jules Verne, who had begun his career as a writer of science fiction with a "naive faith in the beneficial consequences of scientific progress unrelated to the social structure of society," gradually came to see a connection between the two, just as "at the end of his life [he] arrived at the idea of the possible catastrophic consequences of the progress of science." On the other hand, "Wells began from this premise. Jules Verne described the discrepancy between moral and technical progress. Wells gave it a socially concrete form."[3]

It was Wells's early social comedies that demonstrated his almost obsessive interest in class and the theme of escape from it. The escape can never be into another class (and this is what differentiates Wells so sharply from his predecessors): if it is possible at all it is either into some wish-fulfilling rural retreat—as in *Mr Polly*, so savagely answered by George Orwell in *Coming Up for Air* (1939), where the rural retreat has been destroyed by "progress"—or into a boldly imagined future, which can as easily lead to nightmare as to utopia. We are not here concerned with charting the course of Wells's enormous literary output, or defining the many changes of attitude reflected in the products of his restless and troubled mind, or illustrating how he used fiction in order to clarify and explore contemporary problems. He is as different from Galsworthy, with his upper-middle-class social conscience, as from Arnold Bennett, with his documentary interests and his view of authorship as a skilled profession leading to social advancement. He is the new man of the turn of the century, who uses the new and rising educational opportunities to emancipate himself from the class into which he was born and to which he seemed to be condemned, and at the same time he employs the knowledge he acquired in the process to relate the problems of his day to cosmic problems of time and space. "He showed, as no one else had ever done, that only the future could judge the present; entire social classes became his heroes, his background was the universe, his period—infinity."[4] The pessimism of his last years only emphasized that the new man found himself in the end trapped more deeply than ever in the intractable problems of the old world.

John Galsworthy (1867–1933) is both less interesting as a social phenomenon and less versatile as a writer than Wells. Educated at Harrow and Oxford, he did not have to fight his way up from the lower middle class as Wells had to do, and although his finest novel, *The Man of Property* (1906), was, in his own words, "conceived in satiric mood,"[5] he is not primarily a social satirist. His "embalming [of] the upper middle class" (his own phrase) in this novel is a considerable feat of humane observation and recollection, but the theme of "the impingement of Beauty, and the claims of Freedom, on a possessive world," as he summed it up in his 1922 preface to *The Forsyte Saga* (the trilogy of novels of which *The Man of Property* was the first), gives no moral or psychological complexity to the story because it is handled in such a programmatic and mechanical manner. His later novels, dealing with the younger generation after World War I, give very much an outsider's viewpoint. Galsworthy was really rooted in a 19th-century genteel tradition of compassionate but gentlemanly concern for social problems. He had none of Dickens's baroque violence, Thackeray's pervasive irony, George Eliot's moral sophistication, or Hardy's cosmic sense of the limitations and perversities of the human condition. Partly of the squirearchy, partly an upper-middle-class professional (he was trained as a barrister), Galsworthy explored the social scene from a quietly assured position above what he was describing. He is intelligent, concerned, progressive. His plays, notably *The Silver Box* (1906) and *Justice* (1910), are straightforward actings-out of social problems and injustices, such as that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor, or that life in prison has appalling effects unrecognized by the administrators of justice and by the public. Often he sees both sides of a situation and recognizes that in terms of motives it is not a question of black against white; but in spite of the intelligence and the humanity there is a lack of imaginative breakthrough. It is in this sense that he justifies Virginia Woolf's charge of materialism: like Wells, but in a different way and from a quite different point of view and without Wells's questing imagination, he is concerned with people's behaviour and not with their inward states.

Socially, Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) falls between Wells and Galsworthy; son of a provincial solicitor and educated at Newcastle-under-Lyme Middle School, which he left at the age of 16, he moved up from the position of a solicitor's clerk through journalism to novel writing.* He wrote of the pottery towns of his native Staffordshire with a dedicated realism he had learnt from Balzac, Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Maupassant; no other English novelist has written of the lower middle classes in industrial towns in quite Bennett's way. There is no social indignation and no sense of the class system as a horrible trap for those caught in its lower sections (such as we find in Wells). By the careful documentation of detail Bennett seeks to make the ordinary humanly interesting. *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) is the life story of two sisters from the pottery town of "Bursley" (Burslem), and although it includes an elopement and scenes set in Paris during the siege of 1870, it triumphs through its dogged piling up of objects and incidents rather than through any exploration of human feeling. The *Clayhanger* series (1910–6) similarly works through objects and incidents; and *Riceyman Steps* (1923), a sordid story of a miserly bookseller in a drab part of London, employs a similar technique of remorseless assembly of detail to evoke atmosphere with remarkable power. There is no successful direct confrontation of human problems in Bennett's characteristic works; they are presented obliquely through the environment in which the characters live and move and the sequences of events in which they become involved. Thus Bennett deserves Virginia Woolf's appellation of "materialist" more than Galsworthy, and obviously much more than Wells. The surprising thing about his best work is that the human meaning comes through obliquely, through the symbolic functioning of objects and actions. Bennett's aims were limited and strictly professional. Wells wrote novels to probe man's present state and future destiny; Galsworthy wrote to present certain social and moral problems of his time; but Bennett wrote in order to be a novelist, to advance himself in his profession, and he used the material he knew best. All three looked out on the world around them rather than inward to problems of consciousness, moral feeling, and human relationships. For them the external world that lay around them was the most real thing they knew or could know.

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* The class system was both simpler and more fluid in the industrial Midlands, where Bennett was born, than in the south of England, where Wells was born. See WALTER ALLEN, *Arnold Bennett* (Denver 1949), pp. 11–2, for some illuminating comments on Bennett's social background.

II

It was precisely this feeling that the external world around them was the most real thing that bothered Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), for whom reality was not public and external but personal and inward. "What is meant by reality?" she asked in a lecture at Cambridge in 1928. The question would have struck any 19th-century novelist as absurd. We all know what reality is for the novelist, they might have replied: it is all around us, to be observed in streets and shops and drawing-rooms. And Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells would have given a similar answer. But Virginia Woolf answered differently:

> [Reality] would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable—now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. . . . Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us.[6]

Reality for Virginia Woolf is thus no longer something public, but something to be intuited as a result of a personal mood. And anything, however trivial or meaningless it might be on a public standard, can be invested with significance—can become "reality"—if it is apprehended in the appropriate manner. Similarly, James Joyce believed in the "epiphany," in the sudden and wholly unexpected revelation of significance in some casual incident or object. Suddenly and inexplicably the sensitive observer becomes seized with a conviction that this incident, this snatch of overheard conversation, this moment of apparently trivial experience, is deeply and movingly human. And it becomes the writer's task to find a technique for presenting these personally intuited moments of reality in such a way that the reader accepts their significance.

Galsworthy and Bennett moved their stories forward in the traditional manner of marking significant moments of change or crisis by one or more of the three ways in which 18th- and 19th-century novelists showed their public sense of what was important in experience—by a character's rise or fall in social class, by gain or loss of money, and by change in marital situation (these three were generally intimately related). Wells, too, used these traditional markers in his early social comedies. Considering the range of social class spanned by these three writers, we can see that class difference cannot by itself explain the great change that came over the novel in the first quarter of the present century—the change from looking outward to looking inward, from accepting a public criterion of what was significant in experience to falling back on a private one. For in this respect these three novelists were all traditional, different though they were in class origin and outlook. The new novel, which rejected public criteria of the significant, came from several different sources. One is almost tempted to say—considering that its most significant practitioners were Conrad, Joyce, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and E. M. Forster—that to be involved in the new movement one had to be an "outsider" (Conrad the Pole, Joyce the Irishman), a member of an intellectual aristocracy with independent means (Woolf, Forster), or a cross between two social classes (Lawrence, with his miner father and genteel ex-school-teacher mother). But one must make distinctions. The differences between these novelists are as important as the similarities.

Speaking of Jane Austen and Scott, Virginia Woolf once remarked:

> They have their judgment of conduct. They know the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe. Neither of them probably has a word to say about the matter outright, but

> everything depends on it. . . . To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality.[7]

This pinpoints very neatly the problem of the modern novelist as she saw it. The modern novelist could not believe that his impressions held good for others, as his predecessors had been lucky enough to be able to do; he had too great a sense of the ultimate privacy of human experience, partly because of what modern psychologists had taught him about levels of consciousness and the degree to which all our present reactions are determined by the store of previous experiences that lie somewhere in the hinterland of our consciousness, and partly because of that general sense of isolation from public standards and gestures that the artist had been increasingly feeling throughout the latter part of the 19th century and which found more obvious expression in the bohemian-*versus*-bourgeois confrontation and in the concept of the "alienated" artist. This concept took many forms. The aesthetic movement of the late 19th century is clearly related, in its causes if not in its nature, to the dropping of public criteria of significance that we find in the plots of some of the most important novelists of the first third of the 20th century. And there is a social dimension here, even though one cannot formulate the difference between the "materialistic" novelists and the others in simple class terms. There is a lack of at-one-ness between the writer and his society, a suspicion that middle-class values do not reflect the genuine needs of the human mind and imagination, opposition to the great commonplaces and accepted taboos, which at an earlier stage in England was represented by Matthew Arnold's fight against the philistines (who were "materialists" in much the same sense intended by Virginia Woolf when she hurled this appellation at Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells).

The point at which a sense of the ineluctable privacy of human experience produces new art-forms—and nobody can deny that such a sense of privacy has invaded all the arts in the 20th century in a great variety of ways, from the obscurities of free-association poetry to the purely personal patternings of certain kinds of non-representational painting—is determined by the whole socio-cultural scene. A novelist, for example, can have a deep sense of the essential privacy of human experience without this producing a literary revolution. Laurence Sterne (1713–69) had learnt from the 17th-century philosopher John Locke what modern novelists learned from Freud and others—that the individual mind is the product of all the forces that have acted on it since birth (or even before that), and that the nature of an individual's response to anything is determined by the sum of his previous sensations and mental acts, whether he is consciously aware of these or not. In *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760) Sterne explores the comic results of individuals being so conditioned by the chain of associations they derive from the privacy of their own experience that they continually misunderstand each other. The narrator's father, with his obsession about names, and Uncle Toby, with his obsession about fortifications and siege-works, continually translate each other's remarks into the language of their own obsessive world, and this results in comic misunderstanding. But Sterne does not see this as a tragic or a desperate dilemma, or as proof of the ultimate isolation of all human beings and of the special alienation of the artist. He sees it simply as a source of richly comic situations. And they are comic rather than actually or potentially tragic because for Sterne simple affection can always spark across the gulf that language cannot bridge. When the brothers Shandy reach a climax of monstrously comic mutual misunderstanding, a touch or a smile or a quiet and sudden realization of their common humanity (generally on Toby's part) restores communication. Such a solution of the problem is less available to the 20th-century novelist, because the whole socio-cultural situation has now become such as to force the artist of integrity and sensitivity away from the public gesture, the common standard (which had become suspect as *cliché*), in search of his private sense of reality. Virginia Woolf's definition of reality as something essentially personal, like Joyce's "epiphany," was not simply the result of the writer's having discovered that every human being is unique; that had been discovered long ago. It was rather the result of social and cultural factors giving new and desperate meaning to the view of the individual's uniqueness. The writer felt challenged by public values in a way in which nobody in *Tristram Shandy* ever did; the rituals, gestures, codes, and behaviour patterns of society as a whole not only ignored but did violence to the reality of individual experience, and frustrated individual psychological needs. This is as true for Virginia Woolf, whose Sir William Bradshaw, supreme example of unimaginative conformity, drove Septimus Warren Smith to his death in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), as for the very different D. H. Lawrence, whose poem "How Beastly the Bourgeois Is" is only the most obvious example in his work of his view of the distorting and corrupting effect of bourgeois conventions on psychological and moral health.

The so-called Bloomsbury Group, of which Virginia Woolf was at the centre, sprang from a variety of origins, and its members were by no means from a single social class. One of its principal strains derived from a group of young men at Cambridge at the turn of the century, and two of these—Thoby Stephen (Virginia Woolf's brother) and Lytton Strachey—belonged to families that could claim to be of the intellectual aristocracy of London. But another, Leonard Woolf (who married Virginia Stephen), came from a middle-class London Jewish family, though a completely assimilated one; and Clive Bell (who married Virginia's sister Vanessa) came "from a family which drew its wealth from Welsh mines and expended it upon the destruction of wild animals."[8] In the early years of the present century the Bloomsbury Group was in rebellion against Victorianism, rejecting its taboos (including its sexual taboos), resenting its stuffiness and authoritarianism, and substituting for its moral earnestness a belief in freely explored and developed personal relations.

In the matter of personal relations, no one spoke more convincingly and more persistently for the group than E. M. Forster (1879–1973), for whom the proper conduct of personal relations represented the centre of the moral life. All his novels are about this, about the twists and distortions and frustrations that middle-class notions of respectability and propriety impose on fullness of personal living and about the possibilities of individual liberation from these. It was individual, not social, liberation that Forster was concerned with, the "little society," not the "great society"; for the great society was always wrong: standards, codes, rituals, gestures belonging to society as a whole were bound to be at best inadequate for the needs of personal relationships and at worst positively destructive to individual fulfilment. Although, in Lionel Trilling's words, "all his novels are politically and morally tendentious and always in the liberal direction,"[9] Forster is not really a political novelist, nor is he—as Trilling also points out—a typical representative of the liberal imagination. Although his own sensibility was nourished on that leisure which is the prerogative of a certain class only, Forster never spoke out for that class and had indeed a certain uneasiness about the social and political base of his own sensitivities and preferences. One could say of many of the Bloomsbury Group what D. S. Savage said of Forster:

> The life of Forster's characters, as members of the English upper-middle classes, is based upon falsehood because it is based on unearned income, derived from nameless and unmentioned sources, and all their independence, freedom, culture, "personal relationships" are only made possible by this fact. . . . For an inner spiritual change which affects one's attitude to one or two other selected persons only, and does not extend itself to include every other human being irrespective of social distinction, is invalidated from the start.[10]

The argument that what everybody cannot have cannot be valuable is an odd one, but it is true that Forster's interest, like Virginia Woolf's, was in personal relationships of peculiar sensitivity and intensity, and that this is not a political interest. Even his last and finest novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), although it makes many criticisms of the behaviour of the British in India, is not strictly a political novel at all, but a novel of personal relationships that uses the larger canvas of relationships between races to explore the individual problem on a different scale.

For neither Virginia Woolf nor Forster are the significant moments in the experience of their characters measurable in traditional public terms, as they are for Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells in his early social novels. Nor are they for D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), who, though deeply at odds with Bloomsbury, is curiously like Forster in his presentation of the inhibiting effect of bourgeois convention and his stress on the importance of discovering for oneself the reality of personal relations, which may be realized in unexpected and oblique ways. In some of his short stories, such as "Daughters of the Vicar," Lawrence deals with the liberation from the distortions of bourgeois stuffiness almost exactly as Forster does in *his* short stories. At his best, Lawrence was able to relate class feeling to the question of adequate human relationships with a fierce originality sharply different from Forster's gently hellenizing humane irony, and in his two finest novels, *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), he combines an acute surface realism, a sharp sense of time and place, and brilliant topographical detail with a symbolic use of class objects and attitudes in exploring both the relation between the sexes and the possibilities of individual fulfilment through sexuality and through friendship. But he is like Forster in that, for all the social and political implications of his insights, his concern is with individual relationships and not with patterns of society as such.

Although these novelists who looked inward for the truth of human experience, as opposed to the "materialists" who looked outward, were not as a rule concerned with politics in their novels, there is a sense in which they were more deeply political than the "materialists." Lawrence's identification of the forces that freeze, distort, or corrupt human relationships as bound up with both the behaviour patterns of the bourgeoisie and the power-drivers of capitalism (see, for example, Chapter XVII, "The Industrial Magnate," of *Women in Love*), no less than the anti-Victorianism of the Bloomsbury Group, reflected a deep unease about modern industrial society that a Marxist would not have too much trouble in relating to the contradictions of capitalism.

James Joyce (1882–1941)—who left Dublin in order to spend his life abroad writing about it, epitomizing in his life and work the theory and practice of the artist as exile—however aggressively he asserted his aloofness from politics, was in fact acting out a political position in his whole way of thinking and writing. Joyce maintained that the true artist is wholly objective, never speaking simply in his own voice; "the artist," Stephen Dedalus maintains in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), "like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."[11] Stephen's position may not have been exactly that of the mature Joyce, but the interesting fact remains that Joyce equated artistic objectivity with exile and felt that he had to flee from Dublin in order to be able to re-create it with a dimension that only art can give. This association of art, objectivity, and exile is related to the fight of the artist against the bourgeoisie, to Matthew Arnold's attack on the philistines, to the aesthetic movement of the 1890s with its retreat from the world of bourgeois values, as well as to such militant anti-bourgeois attitudes as those represented in many of the plays of Ibsen—a dramatist whom Joyce read with enthusiasm as a schoolboy, championed passionately as a student, learned Norwegian to be able to read in the original, and wrote an article about in *The Fortnightly Review* at the age of 18, drawing a message of thanks from the aged master.[12]

An interesting example of the way in which Joyce's objectivity was related to his critical attitude to the society from which he felt it necessary to withdraw if he was to become an artist, is to be found in his letter about *Dubliners* (1914) to the publisher Grant Richards. "My intention," wrote Joyce to Richards on 5 May 1906, "was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. . . . I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard."[13] This is not, of course, strictly true. Joyce was no photographic realist but a cunning symbolist who arranged the naturalistic details of his accounts of Dublin in such a way as to build up enormous reverberations of meaning. Nevertheless, his pose as a man who had to escape from his society in order to tell the truth about it with scrupulous objectivity, as well as the whole tenor of his more-or-less autobiographical *Portrait of the Artist* with its emerging theme that to grow up to be an artist means to grow up to recognize the necessity of exile, involves an implicit political stance that is basically much more radical than the worried genteel reformism of Galsworthy's plays.

If the artist must be an exile, is this because of the special features of bourgeois society, which denies the artist true freedom, or does the maxim hold true whatever the society? The breakdown in agreement between writer and reader about what is significant in experience, and the consequent insistence on the necessity for objectifying the artist's unique response to experience, produced many of those experiments in language discussed above in Professor Mayoux's chapter. Once one becomes suspicious of *any* public system of values as inevitably doing violence to the integrity of the individual experience, then every society is equally suspect by the very fact that it is a society, even if the growth of such suspicion can be attributed to the effects on the artist of one particular social and economic organization. The move toward the small secret society where the members are aware enough of each other's psychological needs to be able to communicate adequately with a minimum of language can be traced in most of Ernest Hemingway's novels: the phenomenon is far from being exclusively European.

An even more savage view of society is implicit in the work of one who can plausibly be considered to be the first "modern" novelist who wrote in English, the Polish-born Joseph Conrad (1857–1924). Writing to R. B. Cunninghame Graham in 1896, Conrad made an uncompromising pronouncement:

> Man is a wicked animal. His wickedness must be organized. Crime is a necessary condition of organized existence. Society is essentially criminal—or it wouldn't exist. It is egoism that saves everything—absolutely everything—everything that we hate, everything that we love.[14]

Conrad was never as explicit as this in his novels, which he sometimes pretended were simple moral tales advocating the traditional virtues of fidelity, honesty, and so on. But in fact Conrad, whose own strange position as Polish patriot turned English merchant seaman turned English novelist (writing in a language he first learned when he was 21, from English sailors on a coasting vessel plying between Lowestoft and Newcastle) gave him a sense of the essential loneliness of the individual and of the disparity between social codes of communication and individual communicative needs a generation before other English novelists began to reflect in their work their awareness of this problem, clung to a kind of stoicism as a mask for a profound pessimism. The social code does not apply in unexpected moments of crisis; conventional moral views break down when we suddenly feel a greater kinship with our moral opposite, as Marlow does with Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" (1902) and the Captain does with the murderer in "The Secret Sharer" (1912); heroism may be a form of extreme selfishness, as at the end of *Lord Jim* (1900); humane feeling may be socially destructive, as when compassion for the dying Negro in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1898) corrupts the crew, and is in any case a form of egotism; society is necessary but it corrupts, loneliness is desirable but it destroys (the theme of *Nostromo* [1904]: the idealistic and well-meaning Gould is corrupted by the "material interests" that he serves in the interests of society, and the aloof and self-contained Decoud is driven to suicide when he finds himself really alone)—these are the themes that emerge from Conrad's best work. Humankind cannot bear too much reality: at the end of "Heart of Darkness" Marlow tells a deliberate lie to Mr Kurtz's "intended" about the manner of Kurtz's death, because the truth is altogether too much. The problems that involve the relation of the individual to society—any society—are insoluble. Conrad was a conservative pessimist, knowing as clearly as any Marxist what "material interests" could do to human relations, but finding no way out. In *Nostromo*, which is full of political and economic understanding of the relation between an under-developed country and its rich capitalist developers, the alternatives to the liberal government that brings in the corrupting power of material interests are shown to be much worse.

III

The Bloomsbury Group really believed that personal relationships were the basis of all value in living, and this implied a belief in their *possibility*, however difficult the establishment of a proper relationship might prove to be. And D. H. Lawrence, for all the fluctuations of his ideas and emotions, believed in the practicability of his recipe for redeeming civilization by looking inward to the deep instinctive forces rather than imposing mechanical constructions from the outside. Between the Victorian who accepted a public view of truth, however much he deplored the public's attitude and behaviour, and the modern novelist who fell back on a personal sense of significance, stood the stoics of the turn of the century. The stoics were fundamentally sceptics, who inherited the Victorian view of the importance of strenuousness and earnestness, yet could not subscribe to Victorian views on religion or the Victorian belief in progress. Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), who is commonly taken to be a spokesman for late Victorian imperialism, is in fact a stoic who saw through Victorian pretensions, yet who maintained a belief in the stiff upper lip for its own sake. His picture of the British Tommy soldiering on in India or on the North West Frontier, unaware of the reasons of policy that determined that he should represent his nation among this alien people—as Queen Victoria, the distant Widow at Windsor, was equally unaware of how the policies she stood for affected the lives of her soldier subjects in distant lands—is a picture of people acting out a code of duty that has no ultimate meaning. Kipling had no illusions about imperialism. He knew that the British dominion would melt away as the Roman had in its day:

> Far-called, our navies melt away;
>   On dune and headland sinks the fire:
> Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
>   Is one with Nineveh and Tyre![15]

He knew that England would get no thanks for her imperial mission, that it could not in the long run succeed, that it could only cause suffering on all sides, but that it had to go on, as a test of character, as a doom or a fate:

> We have fed our sea for a thousand years
>   And she calls us, still unfed,
> Though there's never a wave of all her waves
>   But marks our English dead:
> We have strewed our best to the weed's unrest,
>   To the shark and the sheering gull.
> If blood be the price of admiralty,
>   Lord God, we ha' paid in full.[16]

In novel, short story, and poem Kipling preached the gospel of the relentless law, the necessity of duty for its own sake, the stoic stance:

> When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
> And the women come out to cut up what remains,
> Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
>   An' go to your Gawd like a soldier. . . .[17]

When in 1899 he urged the United States to take up the White Man's Burden in the Philippines, his argument was not that it would improve the lot of the Filipinos, but simply that it would test the white man's endurance and give the Americans a strenuous work-out:

Come now, to search your manhood
  Through all the thankless years,
Cool-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
  The judgment of your peers![18]

We hear the same note in the poetry of A. E. Housman (1859–1936):

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
  Are from eternity and shall not fail.
Bear them we can, and if we can we must.
  Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.[19]

In the preface to his edition (1903–30) of the Latin poet Manilius, Housman attacked erroneous techniques of textual criticism and justified his attack by a curious argument concerning the necessity for working hard even if one could believe in no other values, concluding: "How the world is managed, and why it was created, I cannot tell; but it is no feather-bed for the repose of sluggards."[20] Why Housman should have considered that the one certain thing he knew was that the world was no feather-bed for the repose of sluggards, when one of the major points of his preface was that in fact sluggards had got away with their slovenly work for generations, is difficult to see. But this is important evidence of the survival of a doctrine of moral earnestness after the disappearance of the religious belief that had earlier supported and indeed produced it.

Stoicism in English literature at the turn of the century—and there are many more evidences of it than Kipling and Housman—is thus a kind of Victorian hangover, a survival of evangelical attitudes without evangelical faith. Again, one could make a social diagnosis and relate this to growing uncertainties and contradictions in the social scene, but the problem with this kind of diagnosis is that it attributes so many different effects to the same cause. Yet in a sense and up to a point one *can* relate aestheticism, pessimism, stoicism, the "alienation of the artist," the belief in the primacy of personal relationships, and a variety of other phenomena, to changes in the social situation, and distinguish between the different effects of this single cause by pointing to the different personal histories and class backgrounds of different writers. Bloomsbury had no use for the Housman-Kipling doctrine of strenuousness for its own sake; but then, Bloomsbury believed in cultivated leisure and had the means to pursue it. Lawrence had no use for it, because his father had been a miner and he had no illusions about the benefits of hard work unrelated to the needs of personal fulfilment. Indeed, all those whom background and the accidents of personal history had enabled to escape the Puritan tradition (and more specifically its Victorian manifestation in middle-class evangelical Christianity)—and these included Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells, as well as the Bloomsbury writers, Lawrence, and Joyce—remained untouched by stoicism. Conrad's stoicism is something quite different in origin from that of Housman and Kipling, and springs from a profounder vision.

There was perhaps, at least potentially, a certain self-indulgent quality in the retreat from the public world into inward satisfactions. This emerges in some minor writers of the period immediately before World War I, as in the Georgian poets, cultivating their latter-day pastoralism in damp Sussex cottages, mistaking their combination of humane hedonism, mild ironies, and relaxed rhythms for a poetic renaissance. These poets came from a variety of social backgrounds, but most sought at one time or another a classless rusticity, on the land but not of it. In spite of some recent attempts to rehabilitate these poets, they do not bear much re-reading. Yet something was working there—we consider what the American Robert Frost, who lived among them in his early days as a poet, made of what he found there—and it seems likely that if Edward Thomas (1878–1917) and Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) had not been killed in World War I a renewal of the English poetic tradition might have taken place in the 1920s from within, instead of awaiting the shock treatment of the Americans Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. The war marked a watershed in English poetry in a way that it did not in English prose fiction: this may be because poetry is more immediately bound up with changes in feeling and attitude than fiction is—the senseless horrors of trench war were attacked by poets, notably Siegfried Sassoon, long before the emergence of the "war novel" exposing the realities of war—and it may be because a novel takes longer to write than a lyric poem, so that it does not lend itself to instant responses; it may also be partly because some distinguished and potentially distinguished English poets were killed in the war, but all the novelists we have been discussing in this chapter went on writing throughout the war and survived it.

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CHAPTER 8

Hero and Society in Modern American Literature

Tony Tanner*

I

> He stood for a moment—a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it.[1]
>
> What kind of a pretty boy was this that came apart so horribly?[2]

To begin this first part of the chapter—on 20th-century American novels written before World War II—it is best to bring forward a novel that was in fact published in 1895, *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (1871–1900). This remarkable work—Joseph Conrad said it burst upon the public with "the impact and force of a twelve-inch shell charged with very high explosive"—was published when Crane was only 23 years old. The manner in which it dramatizes the encounter of terrified innocence with the violence of war and the absolute reality of death foreshadows many of the most compelling American novels of our own century. Although he had been a war correspondent in Greece and Cuba, Crane had had no direct experience of military action when he wrote the book: it is, as Hemingway perfectly defined it, "a boy's long dream of war." For Crane childhood, far from being a period of serene innocence, was endlessly troubled by nightmares of imagined threats and anticipated violence. He wrote his novel of young Henry Fleming's initiation into the reality of war out of his own imagination of what the dreaded initiation would be like. The setting he chose was peculiarly suitable because the Civil War, a horrifying outburst of intra-familial slaughter, signified

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* Lecturer in English at the University of Cambridge and Director of English Studies at King's College, Cambridge.

America's loss of innocence. (After that war, the American had "eaten of the tree of knowledge," in Henry James's phrase.) Thus the book strikes us as being at once a matchlessly vivid evocation of a significant historical moment, and an archetypal ritual of initiation. The originality of Crane's book is his depiction of the shifts and developments in the innocent boy's mind as he moves on to the battlefields of history, the Civil War being a particularly bloody image of all the violent arenas of adult life. With Crane we understand for the first time how utterly terrifying the state of innocence can be during the process of initiation.

As a child Henry Fleming "had, of course, dreamed of battles . . . in visions he had seen himself in many struggles."[3] But he never expected the dream to become a reality. When the war breaks out, his mother tries to keep him at home, but "he had made firm rebellion against this yellow light thrown upon the color of his ambitions."[4] As so often in Crane (and American literature generally) the first act of rebellion is against the home, particularly the mother. But when at last Fleming is about to go into battle, "a little panic-fear grew in his mind." He does not know, and cannot know, how he will actually behave in a real "crisis." "He was an unknown quantity. . . . He must accumulate information of himself."[5] It is a classic moment of perception for innocence when Fleming realizes that "the only way to prove himself was to go into the blaze."[6] This is what Hemingway was to call "the moment of truth," the time of the "test" that has been so important for 20th-century fiction. And Henry Fleming fails his first real test. Crane is nowhere more brilliant than in tracing out the psychological states that are the prelude to his flight from the ugly landscapes of violence and death. In his growing panic Fleming starts to feel "alone in space" and "separated from the others" because "No one seemed to be wrestling with such a terrific personal problem."[7] Crane could see that the American dream of being isolated in space might in fact be a nightmare of agonized aloneness and apartness. Fleming's growing fear makes him feel like an alien: "He was a mental outcast." "In the darkness he saw visions of a thousand-tongued fear that would babble at his back and cause him to flee."[8] Shortly afterwards he sees his first corpse, an omen of the reality he is going to meet. And immediately the whole environment becomes vibrant with invisible menace. "He thought he did not relish the landscape. It threatened him."[9] A house looks ominous, the shadows of the woods seem to be full of enemies, and the panic grows: "It was all a trap." This is precisely the feeling innocence often has when it first sets foot in the world of experience.

A preliminary skirmish gives him an illusory sense of having passed the test, but when the full onslaught of the enemy rushes at him, "he was like a proverbial chicken. He lost the direction of safety. Destruction threatened him from all points."[10] Paranoia and pure panic now take full possession of him. He runs from the scene of the battle: "he had fled, he told himself, because annihilation approached." He is in flight from the idea of death, and this precipitates the great central scenes of the book. In his flight he seeks out thicker woods, denser thickets, ever darker places, as though seeking to return to some natural womb and there hide his human shame. "He walked on, going from obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity."[11] He is a real outcast now, a coward shunning his fellows and the searching light of day. He finds what seems the ultimate retreat, a place of absolute quiet "where the high, arching boughs made a chapel." But he is not alone:

> He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. . . . The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip.
>
> The youth gave a shriek as he confronted the thing. . . . The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look.[12]

Here is the core of the book and one of the great moments of confrontation in American literature. The youth has fled the battlefield only to find himself in a horrifying sort of natural charnel house. In running away from corpses he has run into a corpse. A man can avoid everything but death. Death is an absolute, waiting to turn its ghoulish stare on the living from all sides. In Henry Fleming at this moment we can see innocence having to face up to the knowledge it finds hardest to assimilate, the inexorable fact of death.

Fleming flees again, but this time "he began to run in the direction of the battle." The way back is not easy. The very trees and brambles seem to impede his return. Becoming a man is a painful process. More shaming yet, he finds himself involved in a procession of men returning from the battle, but returning with honour: "he was amid wounds. The mob of men was bleeding. . . . He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage."[13] Here again Crane is anticipating one of Hemingway's central images, the honourable wound, which shows that innocence has faced up to and survived its mutilating immersion in the world of experience. The psychological anguish at being alone and unscarred among a community of the wounded has never been more subtly and vividly drawn than in these chapters, when Fleming struggles through the bleeding and dying men to get back to the battlefield.

It is interesting that the remainder of the book, in which Fleming returns to his comrades and becomes a hero in the next battle, is less convincing and probing than the first half of the book. Fleming goes to sleep (it feels like 1000 years) and Crane makes the ritual significance of this very clear. "He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight."[14] He is now an initiate. His former panic turns into a barbaric rage, a lust to kill all that previously threatened him. Crane could see that innocence enraged could be a very ferocious thing; but his notions of heroism are more literary than his insights into fear. The rather inflated conclusion to the book indicates the intended completion of the rite of initiation. "He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man."[15] But Crane's real genius was his understanding of the panic to which innocence is prone as it finds itself on the edge of experience. Like many other American writers he did not have any very convinced or convincing ideas about what a genuine initiation into the community would be like. But in his depiction of the youth's state of mind as he first encounters violence, blood, wounds, and the horrifying fact of death, Crane anticipates many of the most important 20th-century American works of fiction.

The difficulties and torments of youths growing up in the apparent peace of a small American village are really the central preoccupation of Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941) in his most famous work, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). The book is a series of juxtaposed stories that seek to penetrate to some of the private miseries and dreams and agonies that a small town may conceal. In particular many of the stories concern themselves with glimpses into the lives of young boys or "child-men" who are sensitive, lonely, in some way isolated from the communal feeling of the town.

The youth whose presence effectively gives the book what unity it possesses is George Willard. Early on he states his desire to get away from home and the town, and the book ends with his departure—not for the western wilds as Huck had departed, but toward the big modern city, that more general battlefield or man-made jungle in which the 20th-century innocent so often finds, or loses, himself. It is George's groping sensitivity and gradually expanding awareness that Anderson is most interested in: indeed Anderson tried to form his style on the adolescent's view of life, and in doing so evolved a prose that influenced many subsequent writers. In Anderson, perhaps for the first time, the image of the innocent, troubled adolescent also becomes an image for the artist himself. George tells his mother: "I don't know what I shall do. I just want to go away and look at people and think,"[16] and his looking and thinking provide much of the substance and many of the occasions of the novel. In one story we see him imaginatively trying to prepare for the battlefield of adult life. It is called "An Awakening," and in it he walks along the street at night communing with himself (a recurrent activity for the young in this book), and imagining himself to be a soldier.

> As a soldier he pictured himself as an inspector, passing before a long line of men who stood at attention. He began to examine the accoutrements of the men. Before a tree he stopped and began to scorn. "Your pack is not in order," he said sharply. "How many times will I have to speak of this matter? Everything must be in order here. We have a difficult task before us and no difficult task can be done without order."[17]

Through his phantasies he is forming resolutions with which to meet the rigours of the world.

George has not got as far into the battle as Fleming. When his mother dies, "the notion of death could not get hold of him and he was in fact a little annoyed that his mother had died that day."[18] He is rather in that suspended state between childhood and manhood in which the individual has lost his unconscious identity with nature and has not yet found a place in, or relationship to, the forms and structures of the world that awaits him. The adolescent is the distinctively American version of the European "outsider." Anderson himself concentrates much more on that period of adolescence than he does on the state to which it must finally give way, as though adolescence were the most meaningful phase in a person's life, even if it is also a period of insecurity and vulnerability. He cannot really take his youthful characters much further than to the edge of growing-up. The last two stories are appropriately called "Sophistication" and "Departure." In the former, George has his first intimation of the reality of death and the awakening of the sexual instinct.

> There is a time in the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood. . . . Already he hears death calling. With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hands of another.[19]

But where a European novel might take us on into the complexities of marriage and the painful adjustments necessitated by earning a living in society, the book ends with the time-honoured American gesture of departure. "When the train came into the station George felt relieved."[20] This relief at the prospect of imminent release from local pressures and involvements is related to that dream of freedom and great spaces that is endemic in American writing. George climbs happily aboard the train, and these are the last words:

> With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood.

The book typically *ends* with the first mention of George's manhood.

But more than Henry Fleming or George Willard, the most important innocent hero in 20th-century American literature is Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams. He is the model or source for all Hemingway's other major heroes: on the one hand he looks directly back to Huckleberry Finn, on the other he anticipates such modern adolescent protagonists as Holden Caulfield, so that in his person past and present modes of American innocence seem to meet. To attempt to give some outline of the figure of Nick Adams, and the relationship between this figure and Hemingway's own style, let us concentrate on the early short stories written around Adams, chiefly collected in Hemingway's first important book, *In Our Time* (1925). One very important aspect of this book is the presence at the head of every chapter of a short prose sketch that, from the point of view of narrative continuity, is quite unrelated to the story that follows. These prose sketches seem very objective, as though they were laconically impersonal notations. They are all about a scene or moment of violence. Seven of them are about war; six of them are about bull fighting; one of them depicts a police shooting; another a hanging. Nearly all, that is to say, are about wounding, bombing, bleeding, or the moment of death. To appreciate the import and relevance of these apparently gratuitous interpolations we must look at some of the stories about Nick Adams growing up as a boy in America.

In the first story, "Indian Camp," Nick is taken by his father to an Indian shanty where the father has to deliver a baby. "Nick did not watch"[21]—the child drawing back from knowledge of these awesome adult mysteries and messes—but he sees something worse than natural birth, and that is violent death. The husband of the woman cuts his own throat because he cannot stand her screaming.

> His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his

> left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets. . . . Nick, standing in the door of the kitchen, had a good view of the upper bunk when his father, the lamp in one hand, tipped the Indian's head back.[22]

On the way back there is some rather clipped talk with his father, but description takes the place of any rhetorical comment. "The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making circles in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning."[23] A good deal of Hemingway's subsequent work is discernible in embryo here. Nick, the young vulnerable innocent, ventures out into the world only to encounter a horrifying act of violence. It is incomprehensible but real; and in order to prevent himself from going distracted with shock and revulsion, Nick concentrates on the concrete details of the outer world: the sight of the sun, the sound of the leaping bass, the feel of the water. This is the pattern for many of Hemingway's works: an encounter with something evil, violent, wounding, or incomprehensible, and the ensuing necessity to work out a stance with which to confront a world in which such things can happen. Hemingway's style is the verbal equivalent of Nick Adams' stance; they both seek to retain their sanity in a violent and evil world by holding on to visible and tangible particulars. They both seek to escape the turmoils and nightmares of thought by concentrating on the consolations of the senses. But in both the boy and the style we can feel a great horror and terror barely held at bay.

In the Nick Adams stories that follow, we witness the continuing initiation of the boy, seeing, learning, and feeling things that seem to bring more dread than joy. He learns that his father can be a coward, that young love can suddenly go sour, that good times come to an end (" 'All of a sudden everything was over,' Nick said"). He jumps a train and gets smashed off it by a brutal brakeman. He encounters a punch-drunk ex-boxer who wants to beat him up, until the boxer is knocked out by his Negro guardian (and probably lover) who regretfully blackjacks him. (This is only one of many stories that hover around the fact of homosexuality or Lesbianism, another source of horror to the barely initiated innocent.) And it is after this last story ("The Battler") that we meet Nick for the first (and only) time in one of the prose sketches (which precedes the next story). This is a crucial moment and I shall quote most of it:

> Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street. Both legs stuck out awkwardly. He had been hit in the spine. His face was sweaty and dirty. The sun shone on his face. The day was very hot. Rinaldi, big

> backed, his equipment sprawling, lay face downward against the wall. Nick looked straight ahead brilliantly. The pink wall of the house opposite had fallen out from the roof, and an iron bedstead hung twisted toward the street. Two Austrian dead lay in the rubble in the shade of the house. Up the street were other dead. . . . Nick turned his head carefully and looked at Rinaldi. "Senta Rinaldi. Senta. You and me we've made a separate peace."[24]

This intersection of the stories about Nick Adams' youth and the previously unrelated cameos of the variety of the world's violence is precisely the moment of full shattering initiation for Nick Adams. Two worlds have collided and he has moved out of his American childhood into the arena of international violence where he is hit by a shell and wakes up to find himself wounded, among debris and corpses. But, as the first story made us realize, there was violence all around him in his apparently peaceful childhood world. In a later story, "The Killers," Nick and the coloured cook in a café are tied up by two gangsters who have come to kill an ex-boxer, Anderson. Anderson does not turn up as expected, and the gangsters leave. Nick runs to warn Anderson who, however, only thanks Nick and fatalistically waits for the approaching killers. This horrifies Nick, and the whole experience leads him to say, "I'm going to get out of this town."[25] This desire to get away from the ugly scene, the evil place, is exactly what made Huck Finn want to move on, and it is the same impulse behind Nick's most famous gesture of disaffiliation: "we've made a separate peace." Horrified by the violence and cruelty of the adult world, the stunned or wounded innocent disengages himself, psychologically and if possible physically, from the town, from the whole notion of "country," from the shattering terrors of all forms of war.

But the horrors are always coming back as nightmares. In a later story, "A Way You'll Never Be," we see a Nick who is so haunted by violent war memories that his mind is constantly losing control, and he is clearly close to going mad. (Philip Young has shown that the particular spot by a river that brings recurring terror into Nick's night thoughts is in fact a version of the place where Hemingway himself was wounded during World War I.) Again, in "Now I Lay Me," Nick has to find ways of keeping his mind under control, as though a terrible panic and hysteria were very close. One of his ways of holding onto himself is to think about all the physical details of going fishing as a boy, and this explains the highly charged poetry of one of Hemingway's greatest pieces of work, "Big Two-Hearted River" (Parts I and II). This story concludes *In Our Time*, and is preceded by a description of the bloody death of a bull-fighter (Part I), and by a particularly shocking account of a man being hanged

(Part II). The story itself, about Nick going back to a favourite spot to do some fishing, seems deceptively simple. But it soon becomes clear that Nick is a sick man recuperating after some terrible experience. The loving way he attends to all the minute physical details connected with setting up camp, cooking a meal, and preparing his fishing tackle, is also the measure of his need to keep his mind off some unnamed horror that he is trying to push away from him. He deliberately sets out to "choke" thought by relishing each passing sensation. "He did not want to rush his sensations any."[26] The fishing trip is a physical analogue to Hemingway's prose, a meticulous ritual to ward off the horror of unbearable experience and to anchor the wounded innocent in a clean, orderly camp and the concrete reassurances of natural terrain.

The river is not all benevolent, of course; it has two hearts. There is a dark ominous part to it, where it goes into a swamp.

> In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any farther to-day.[27]

That dark part of the river is a natural equivalent to those dark areas of experience to which Nick has been exposed in the book. It is from this area that at the moment he is holding back. Because he has been there, and he has seen enough to know that what is ultimately waiting there is injury and death—death, as the prose headings to each chapter remind us, in any number of horrible and violent forms. Nick, like his author's style, is trying to hold himself clean and away from the abysmal experiences of the swamp. At the same time it is knowledge of the swamp that gives both the fishing and the writing their excruciating tension.

This picture of a wounded innocence—which has already seen and known and been exposed to too much—seeking to regain an earlier sanity, and to make a separate peace away from all the wars, is right at the centre of Hemingway's work, if not at the centre of American literature. This is why Crane's work was so prophetic, because the 20th-century innocent is unusually war-haunted. All Hemingway's main characters go to some war or other—World War I, the Spanish Civil War, World War II—or see life in terms of war. If at times they seem to accept these conditions of life with a grim stoicism, this is not the final blunting of the sensitivities of innocence, but a desperate attempt to acquire a shell that will afford some protection for their lacerated vulnerabilities. When Hemingway's prose describes some atrocious scene with unimpassioned coolness and clarity, the apparent emotional neutrality is a protection against hysteria and horror. With such strategies of self-control does innocence seek to keep a grip on itself when confronted by the cut throats and the scattered corpses of modern life, the havoc and horror that await it.

In "The Killers," Nick says: "I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."[28] After witnessing the final bloody follies of the Grangerford feud, Huck Finn says: "I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I dream about them." Comparing Nick Adams and Huck Finn, in what seems to me the most perceptive and important of all the books on Hemingway (*Ernest Hemingway: a Reconsideration*, 1966), Philip Young shows how similar are their experiences and responses. "In each case we have a boy dissatisfied with respectability . . . who runs away from home. . . . It was easy to flee respectability, but as for brutality both boys jumped the pan for the fire. Off on their own they came up against it hotter than ever. Then they were both hurt, and permanently scarred, and after that they both rebelled utterly against the ways of a society that sponsored horror. . . . In each case a sensitive decent boy has been wounded by contact with a senselessly brutal society, and has disaffiliated. Now like the scars, the escapes seemed permanent; Huck to the 'territory' and—since America no longer has a frontier, is 'finished'—the hero to foreign lands. The stories are very nearly identical in structure."[29] This structure may be said to be archetypal in American literature. And the title of Hemingway's first book, with its allusion to the old cry "Give peace in our time, O Lord," ironically underlines another discovery of the modern innocent: there is no peace in our time.

Where the Hemingway youth tries to contain and subdue his horrors, Thomas Wolfe's troubled adolescent strives desperately for full and adequate articulation. In *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), Wolfe (1900–38) poured out thousands and thousands of words in an undisciplined attempt to evoke the wonders and turmoils of his own American boyhood. The only thing that gives the book any continuity is the presence of the growing sensitive boy, Eugene Gant, a thin disguise for the author himself. The book is simply an attempt to get down everything that Eugene sees, hears, feels, reads, learns, suffers, thinks; all the resources of language that Wolfe can reach are mined in an attempt to depict all the sensations and emotions of a growing boy. The book "was written in innocence and nakedness of spirit,"[30] claimed Wolfe, and what is remarkable about the book is the vibrating intensity with which he wrote of all the tiny mundane details of a boy's life. His work has what he once called a "blazing tenacity of detail," and all the ordinary things of house and shop and village and town are turned into a series of revelations and miracles as they strike Eugene's infinite capacity for wonder. Such is the intensity of this innocent response to the given world that he instinctively finds mythical equivalents for his relations and surroundings. His father is "hammer-hurling Thor," his brother is an Apollo, and so on. (This mythologizing of an apparently ordinary home environment is also a characteristic of the hero of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, 1953.)

All the ingredients of adolescence are here: family rows, frustration with the village community, an early agonized love affair, the passionate discovery of literature, terrible moments of disillusion, the first attempts to break away, and so on. Wolfe manages to re-create with amazing vividness all the people and things and sights and experiences of this boyhood: it seems that there can be no greater adventure than this first coming to awareness of self and of the world. In its unfailing wonder it is a very American book. What one does notice is that there is something unsteady in the rhetoric. It is as though he is trying to formulate something that forever eludes him, and in his desperate attempts to bring in more and more words and allusions he begins to betray something approaching hysteria. Now this is a revealing and moving feature of the book, because it extends the feeling (which the words also convey) that Eugene never feels at home, at ease, in the world. Paradoxically, despite the thunderous outpourings of words and the attendant vividness of all the pictures of his home life, the ultimate effect is of a failure to communicate. In spite of all his talk—one can begin to understand the paradox—the young troubled hero is terribly cut off and separate.

This is underlined by a key thread of imprisonment imagery that goes right through the book. It is revealingly ambivalent imagery: sometimes he is imprisoned by society, more often by himself. "The prison walls of self had closed entirely round him; he was walled completely by the esemplastic power of his imagination"; "walled up in his great city of visions"; "he knew that he would always be the sad one: caged in that little round of skull, imprisoned in that beating and most secret heart, his life must always walk down lonely passages. Lost."[31] These quotations are typical: always there is the emphasis on a sealed-off apartness that underlies all the desperate reachings out for contact, the compulsive flights of words. Paradoxically it seems that Eugene escapes from all the imprisoning structures and impositions of home and society into the prison of himself.

There is a great burst of clarity when he finally does leave home and speaks out to his mother:

> "The first move I ever made, after the cradle, was to crawl for the door, and every move I have made since has been an effort to escape. And now at last I am free from you all. . . . If I am not free, *I am at least locked in my own prison.*"[32]

I have italicized those last words because they seem to me to express with great precision a feeling, a strategy, that has become increasingly common in American literature: a determination on the part of the writer, the hero, to resist society by withdrawing into a private space, even if it is imaginative space. Wolfe was perceptive enough to realize that such a defensive withdrawal into a private world could also be a form of self-imprisonment. His book ends—as so many American books end—by not ending, by showing the young innocent hero about to move on. As we have noted before, the instinctive momentum of the American hero is centrifugal, away from the centres and structures of society. If he is to be imprisoned he prefers to be imprisoned in his own world—in worlds of his own making.

In 1934 there appeared a new version of the American theme of the destruction of innocence—the version of Nathanael West (1904–40), a savage and at times surrealistic humorist whose work was to exert a growing influence on American writers. This novel was *A Cool Million* (1934), and it was drily subtitled "The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin." Lemuel Pitkin is yet another example of that archetypal American boy who sets out from his poor country home to seek fortune in the big cities. But his adventures amount to a black inversion of the traditional rags-to-riches myth, so fondly cherished in America as a proof of the ample possibilities open to willing and aspiring youth. For "dismantling"—with its suggestion of the methodical taking-apart of an inanimate object—very exactly covers what befalls the unbelievably luckless Lemuel.

He is not disillusioned: on the contrary his illusions remain pathetically intact to the end. He is simply taken to pieces, never more brutally than when he is attempting some deed of honour and selflessness. He tries to stand up to a lawyer who has made his mother cry, and is pushed into a cellar. He saves a girl from a bully's mad dog, and is smashed insensible for his pains, while the bully gets on with his rape. On the train to New York, where he goes in quest of some money to help his mother ("America is the land of opportunity. She takes care of the honest and industrious and never fails them as long as they are both," a failed politician assures him), he is not only robbed but arrested and badly beaten up by the police.

As part of a programme of cure, all his (perfectly sound) teeth are taken out: "Because you have never had a toothache does not mean that you will never have one"[33] is an example of the nightmare pseudo-logic his innocence uncomprehendingly runs into. A cold shower treatment gives him pneumonia and damages his lungs. Back in the city he stops some runaway horses from trampling down an old man and his daughter, only to be blamed by the old man, who thinks he is the responsible careless groom. The insurance men defraud him, and through a kick from a horse he loses an eye. At a later stage he is imprisoned in a brothel and is about to be offered for the homosexual pleasures of a distinguished customer when, fortunately, his false teeth and eye fall out. This sickens the lustful Maharajah, who protests, in apt words: "What kind of a pretty boy was this that came apart so horribly?"[34] A further escapade with the police increases the damage, for every time he protests "I am innocent" he attracts more punishment. As his useless lawyer says, "You haven't got enough money to prove it."[35]

The plot gets wilder and wilder—involving criminal, political, even aesthetic conspiracies of all kinds—but the dismantling continues steadily. A hand is mangled, a thumb amputated. Out in the West, when he makes an attempt to prevent another rape, he puts his leg in a bear trap (which has been placed there for that purpose) and has to have it amputated. He is also scalped during some Indian troubles—quite unjustly, of course. Back in New York he finally finds a job as a stooge in a comic act during which he is constantly beaten. "For a final curtain, they brought out an enormous wooden mallet labelled 'The Works' and with it completely demolished our hero. His toupee flew off, his eye and teeth popped out, and his wooden leg was knocked into the audience."[36]

One night at the theatre he is about to make a speech to raise support for a fascist organization that has deceived him into believing that it is on the side of youth and America. Sincere, gullible, hopelessly unaware of all the manoeuvres going on around him, he starts his speech: "I am a clown . . . but there are times when even clowns must grow serious. This is such a time. I. . . ."[37] At this point he falls dead, assassinated by a gunman from a rival communist organization. He becomes a legend, and his martyrdom is celebrated with orgies of emotion and rhetoric on "Pitkin's Birthday, a national holiday"; "the youth of America is parading down Fifth Avenue in his honour. They are a hundred thousand strong. On every boy's head is a coonskin hat complete with jaunty tail, and on every shoulder rests a squirrel rifle."[38] At the climax of these essentially fascistic proceedings the cry is raised to Lemuel Pitkin: "All hail, the American

Boy!" And thus, with the American dream utterly degraded and rendered grotesque and absurd, the book ends.

There are two aspects of this strange book worth considering here. First, it is part of the meaning of Lemuel's life that, parallel to the physical mutilation of his body, there runs a rhetorical exploitation of his image. As an innocent defenceless boy he is subjected to every imaginable brutality of a heartless society; as a manipulatable image of American youth, hideously deformed by the violence of his country, he can be exhibited in the travelling exhibition called "Chamber of American Horrors," or held up by politicians as an example of how the country is losing its heritage and birthright: "Of what is it that he speaks? Of the right of every American boy to go into the world and there receive fair play and a chance to make his fortune by industry and probity without being laughed at or conspired against by sophisticated aliens."[39] The clear implication is that whereas the idea of the innocent youth continues to play an important part in American mythology and ideology, in fact the incarnations of that innocence are "dismantled" with ferocious rapidity by modern American society.

The second aspect to note is the kind of humour that dominates the book. On the narrative level we are simply presented with one outrage or horror after another; but the very exaggeration and the almost cartoon-like schematic brevity of the scenes unite to produce a very humorous effect (in part also derived from the methodical, unrelenting negation of literary *clichés* at every turn). This humour may be thought of as mad, black, sick, or absurd: but whatever its latter-day manifestations, its appearance at this time is extremely important. For one thing, it is a kind of "victim" humour, the desperate laughter born of feelings of helplessness and uncomprehending horror. In this connection we may date the growing influence of Jewish writing on American literature from around this time. As the urban experience becomes the dominant one for Americans, and rural realities recede, the Jewish writer has tended to move from the periphery to the centre of the literary scene. One other implication in West's humour is that desperate *literary* stratagems are becoming necessary to confront and contain American experience. It is as though the violence and horror of what he sees is so vast and potentially overwhelming that he must try to assert against it all the personal resilience and improvisatory daring of his own style. The writer thereby preserves what his characters, often reduced to mere automata, have long since lost—a freedom of movement and expression. In this way West is a forerunner of such apparently different contemporary writers as James Purdy, Terry Southern, William Burroughs, John Hawkes, John Barth, and others. And one also notes in West's novel that the most important figure of innocence is not so much the characters, who are all ciphers in a diagram, as the author himself. It is West's, not Pitkin's, innocence that is really outraged, and underneath all the wild and improbable laughter, it is the author more than any of his characters who is crying: "I want to know why."

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that this sort of anarchic urban humour completely displaced the more classic modes of the central American theme that we have been tracing. In 1942 William Faulkner (1897–1962) published a story that many people regard as his masterpiece, "The Bear," which at bottom is as old as American literature, and in execution is one of its peaks. The main part of the story is an account of a boy's apprenticeship in the woods as a hunter, and his participation in the hunting down of a bear of mythical age and power. The boy has "to earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter,"[40] and the bear "with one trap-ruined foot," in his awesome and splendid power, is an incarnation of "that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness."[41] (In this respect the bear is comparable to Melville's whale, Moby Dick.) As the boy enters his "novitiate" to the true wilderness it seems to him that "he [is] witnessing his own birth."[42] Paradoxically a part of this birth is the relinquishing of all the trappings of civilization. He finds that he can see the bear only if he leaves behind not only his gun but also his watch and compass (man's tools for dividing up time and space). His willingness to abandon himself to the wilderness is one of the great moments of the book. "He stood for a moment—a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it."[43] When he thus becomes absorbed into the timeless continuum of nature, he is afforded a glimpse of what he came to see. "Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him."[44]

For this boy the wilderness is "his college," and the bear "his alma mater." But what he learns cannot be translated into the terms used by society's institutions. The boy's tutelary spirit is a man of Indian and Negro descent called, aptly enough, Sam Fathers. The America he is being initiated into is the one that was there before white men came and soiled it with their greed, exploitation, and destructiveness. Indeed one character says that the boy has a knowledge that is older than any knowledge in the possession of those adults who huddle together inside their social structures in order to defend themselves against the wilderness they hate:

> ". . . this boy was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks to keep yourselves from having to find out what this boy was born knowing and fearing too maybe but without being afraid. . . ."[45]

This feeling for the silent wisdom of innocence in its instinctive communion with non-social nature is an abiding one in American literature, and it has seldom been so lyrically and powerfully expressed as it is in this story.

The bear is killed, with the help of a dog as wild as the wildness it is used to hunt down. But at the end of the book the boy, now grown up, returns to the woods. He is horrified at all the evidence of encroaching civilization—mills, rails, buildings—and even though he has to travel on a train he averts his eyes from all the evidence of man-made things. He "looked no more save toward the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide himself from it once more anyway."[46] Once in the woods he feels that he brings with him an air of pollution from "civilization," "as garments carry back into the clean edgeless blowing of air the lingering effluvium of a sick-room or of death."[47] But, rather like Nick Adams returning to the river, he does manage to reimmerse himself once more into the blessedly non-human otherness of nature. The train, constant reminder of man's intrusion on nature, pulls out of earshot. "He could no longer hear it. The wilderness soared, musing, inattentive, myriad, eternal, green; older than any mill shed, longer than any spur line."[48]

Finally, leaving behind a friend he has met, he finds himself in the state he sought. "Then he was in the woods, not alone but solitary; the solitude closed around him, green with summer."[49] If there is one situation that the American hero has always yearned for and sought after, it is exactly this: "in the woods, not alone but solitary." Towns mean crowds, complexities, corruption, woundings, every kind of deception; they also mean time, and death. And all these the American hero would like to leave behind him, like Faulkner's innocent boy who left behind his gun, watch, and compass, and relinquished himself to the green and markless wilderness.

There is perhaps no more expressive gesture in all American literature.

II

> I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself.[50]

> "I am right weary—weary of innocence." "La, then speak no farther!" Her voice was husky, her eyes bright; she held out both her hands for him to take. "Hither with thee, and an end to innocence!"
>
> But though he took her hands to show that his own were a-tremble with desire and appreciation, Ebenezer would not embrace her.[51]

> "The experience, the experience. Haven't you learned?"
>
> Profane didn't have to think long. "No," he said, "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddam thing."[52]

It is noticeable that although the novels discussed in the previous section cover a wide range of American styles and techniques—Crane's impressionism, the Freudian explorations of Anderson, the objective economy of Hemingway, Wolfe's confessionalism, the absurd humour of West, the baroque richness of Faulkner—they all reveal a preoccupation with the wonders and fears of innocence, its initiation into or away from society, its encounters with the world of experience. Although stylistic experiments and innovations have continued unabated in American writing since World War II (indeed, the proliferation of highly idiosyncratic styles is in itself a significant phenomenon of the period), a similar preoccupation with figures of innocence and their fate is readily discernible. J. D. Salinger's pained adolescent Holden Caulfield is clearly related to Huck Finn, as is Saul Bellow's Augie March; and, more generally, countless novels organize themselves around the movement of some innocent figure through bewildering or menacing territories. Innocence still prevails in the American novel, but—as Ihab Hassan has shrewdly observed—it is an innocence that, in many cases, has "begun to lend itself to the uses of defeat."[53]

Rather than trace out different plot lines that are really variations of a pattern made abundantly clear by the books already discussed, I intend to offer some general comments on the figure of the contemporary American hero and the environment in which he is involved, as these are refracted by American fiction since the last war. Images of the innocent as victim have increased, and in general the dominant and recurrent characteristics of the modern American hero tend to be passivity, powerlessness, and confusion. At the same time he often manifests a resilience, an energy of evasion (if not an energy of construction), and a saving humour that makes for survival if it does not always promote growth. He is, or feels himself to be, still innocent, put-upon, not at home in the given world; and he finds the process of achieving full adulthood or citizenship too bewildering, too painful, or simply too corrupting to be accepted. As has been noted, this is fairly traditional in the American novel. What is new is a stress on role-playing, masks, acting, the feeling of discontinuous identity, of the self as process rather than fixity, so that the hero may find himself involved in a series of impersonations and improvisations rather than the sure realization of certain innate potentialities (Huck Finn's role-playing among the people of the shore anticipates this in some ways). The hero dreads finding himself becoming what he is expected to become, rather than his own true self. (David Riesman's category of the "other-directed" in *The Lonely Crowd* [1950] is the sociological definition of the state the fictional hero seeks to avoid.) But what is the true self? Here is a problem for the modern American hero. If he stays too long with a social group he gets absorbed into it and loses his identity, his individuating brilliance, his peculiar differentiating energy; if he flees from society, can he be his true self in isolation?

Does Augie March, after all his many adventures in America, Mexico, and Europe, find his true self? He celebrates the self, but he cannot find anything to do with it. "I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself."[54] Contact without commitment, touch without communication: this is the rhythm of Augie's existence. He also confronts another paradox that has become central for the American hero. As one of his friends formulates it: "I know this double poser, that if you make a move you may lose but if you sit still you will decay."[55] This pull between the instinct for mobility and the inclination for fixity, the seemingly insoluble struggle between a will to movement (which dissipates and diffuses the energy of the hero) and an inclination toward inertia, a secret stillness (which ultimately involves a stagnation of that energy), is at the heart of modern American fiction.

One result of this radical uncertainty as to how to direct the energy of the self is that the modern American hero tends to be Protean, a man of multiple roles, without one anchoring focus. He is all potential, nothing actual. Augie is always consenting to play other people's games, to fit into their schemes, to be what they expect him to be: yet he cannot rest in any of these roles, and he changes continuously without any final settling. Another result is that we find figures who are immobilized by a sense of their own potential, who cannot embark on defining action because they cannot choose among the infinite possibilities. We often see Augie stretched out prone on a couch or in a chair, his head seething with so many possibilities that action is impossible until someone or something external prods him into it. "You've got more possibilities than you know what to do with," says one friend to him, "But you lie here in a wicker chair."[56] It seems that Augie is destined to oscillate indefinitely between private proneness and role-playing with other people. The most assured energy in the book is that which went into writing it, the euphoric and inclusive vividness with which Augie tells his story, as though he thereby asserts a freedom in the world of words that was not available to him in the world of things and people.

The sense of infinite possibilities is responsible for the fitful inertia and indecision of another important recent American hero, Ebenezer Cooke, in John Barth's idiosyncratic historical novel about 18th-century Maryland, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960). "The moment I grow sensible that I must choose, I see such virtues in each alternative that none outshines the rest."[57] Cooke is an innocent, idealistic, and virginal poet who sets out from England for the American brave new world. There are many mordant ironies (the first human he sees on reaching America is a flogged Negro), and his literary expectations are constantly being undermined by the savage realities of the unsettled continent. In the treacherous atmosphere of plot and counter-plot, the innocent Cooke is constantly making mistakes that have serious repercussions. He insists on retaining his virginity, as being necessary for the purity of his art; he is forever holding back from the proffered embraces of the world. Yet the final lesson he has to learn is that his innocence was itself a sort of crime, an agent of destruction: the lesson is sealed and absolution gained by his going to bed with his pox-ridden wife Joan; he is forced to embrace a diseased and imperfect world. Ebenezer Cooke, like other Barth heroes, is immobilized through the necessity to choose, through his reluctance to make decisive and defining acts. He is like Jacob Horner in Barth's *The End of the Road* (1960) in this respect, and Horner's enigmatic doctor prescribes what he calls mythotherapy as a cure for this paralysis: "Move! Take a role." It seems that only by choosing a role, quite conscious that it is a role, can Barth's figures find any reason to move at all. The self as a unique continuous identity has no inclination to move. It would remain prone in a room, alone and motiveless: it can venture forth into society only by adopting a role. This is the importance of the enigmatic figure of Burlingame in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, who is a virtual incarnation of all Barth's thinking about life as a "game," a series of roles, a constant changing of masks. The existentialist wardrobe is all before him to choose, and the emphasis given to dressing up in various kinds of clothes throughout the book is a way of underlining the idea that a man is only the role he chooses, the mask he dons. "The world's a happy climate for imposture,"[58] says Burlingame, and in due course he covers the whole range, turning up in different guises and on different sides of every national, political, even racial struggle. His constant changes illustrate his conviction that the self is endlessly fluid and a man may make himself over as many times as he chooses. For him both world and self are endlessly manipulatable and malleable. This sort of freedom he sees as the ultimate liberty. " 'Tis philosophic liberty I speak of, that comes from want of history. It throws a man on his own resources, that freedom. . . ."[59] Such total freedom to be anything has a way of turning into another form of imprisonment: in the midst of shapeless swarming possibilities, the American hero may feel a dread of being nothing, which as often as not inhibits all movement. Burlingame, the Protean figure who makes himself completely at home in the world by the constant adoption of roles, by his fluid mutations, and Cooke, the bemused, questioning innocent (also the artist) who is reluctant to go in for role-playing because he feels he must hold on to some individual integrity—these two figures point to a conflict, a tension, that recurs in many American novels since the war.

Two such figures appear in *The Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison (born 1914), the best of the Negro novelists to date, in which the opposition is powerfully dramatized for the first time in post-war fiction. The innocent narrator of the book is a young Negro whom people in society just refuse to see: "It is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me."[60] His initiation into society is an odyssey of pain, manipulation, and rejection. He can find no place in it for his true identity, his personal integrity. But he encounters a figure called Rinehart who has adroitly mastered the alien world by playing multiple roles, from clergyman to gambler. The innocent narrator speculates on the significance of this figure.

> Could he himself be both rind and heart? . . . His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which he lived was without boundaries. A vast, seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home in it. Perhaps *only* Rine the rascal was at home in it.[61]

Rinehart has much the same significance for the narrator as Burlingame has for Cooke. The narrator of *The Invisible Man* does not rest in this conclusion, for he feels that Rinehart's way is wrong, the ultimate diffusion and loss of self. But he learns from him:

> You could actually make yourself anew. The notion was frightening, for now the world seemed to flow before my eyes. All boundaries down, freedom was not only the recognition of necessity, it was the recognition of possibility. And sitting there trembling I caught a brief glimpse of the possibilities posed by Rinehart's multiple personalities and turned away.[62]

He feels invisible, and in this he is almost as American as he is Negro as a hero. And yet he feels there is some chance of an identity, of being and having a genuine self, no matter how absurd its conditions. There is a passage in connection with this which casts light over the whole field of contemporary American fiction. Most heroes traditionally rise, they aspire upward. This is constantly rejected in recent American fiction. Ellison's narrator puts it to himself this way.

> And that lie, that success, was a rising *upward*. What a crummy lie they kept us dominated by. Not only could you travel upward toward success but you could travel downward as well; up *and* down, in retreat as well as in advance, crabways and crossways and around in a circle, meeting your old selves coming and going and perhaps all at the same time. . . . I felt that somewhere between Rinehart and invisibility there were great potentialities.[63]

The fact that the hero does not manage to put his potentialities into constructive action, as opposed to flight, only makes the novel more typically American. He goes underground: "my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. . . . So I took to the cellar; I hibernated. I got away from it all. But that wasn't enough. I couldn't be still even in hibernation. Because, damn it, there's the mind, *the mind*. It would not let me rest."[64] At the end we see him considering a return to the social surface: "the old fascination with playing a role returns, and I'm drawn upward again."[65] A desire to hibernate, and an inability to remain still in hibernation—these conflicting urges are at the heart of many novels besides this particularly powerful vision of the problems of the innocent self in modern America. We see here a basic tension being clarified. There is the desire for a private undisturbed stillness, a place of secrecy and rest; but there is the opposing desire to enter society, to move, to do something, to be someone, to achieve a visible identity. The former condition leads to invisibility, the latter participation necessitates role-playing. Between these two extremes the American hero oscillates, sometimes coming to the implicit conclusion that the true and viable self for which he is seeking may turn out to be a process, a continual experiment, rather than a finished, defined product operating within a specific territory. (The endless inner and outer motion in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* [1957], a very popular book of the 1950s, is an example of this experience of the world and self as endlessly fluid.)

If one considers the environment in which the American hero—or hero-victim—has to survive in recent American fiction, the general impression one gets is that it is a world of intolerable pressures and weights, full of distractions and interruptions. In one of his essays Norman Mailer asserts that "the progressively most common condition for everyone alive is interruption and annoyance . . . we are talking of modern man's ability to swallow nausea . . . his consciousness is formed on collisions and interruptions. . . . We live, remember, in a time which interrupts the mood of everything alive. . . . A people deadened by interruption go mad."[66] In addition we find a growing awareness of a phenomenon that Robert Lifton, an American sociologist, has called "flooding of imagery," the feeling of being deluged by the fantastic flow from modern mass media. We find characters who feel overwhelmed by an endless stream of unrelated alternative images, superficial messages, and undigested cultural elements that promise to release man into new realms of possibilities but that in fact imprison him in a meaningless excess that he can neither use nor reject. In this world where the individual consciousness is subject to intolerable pressures and manipulations, there is no space for a true working out of the self, no time for significantly relating thought to action. As we find it in the novels, this environment is often projected as a nightmare, an estranged world containing portents of apocalypse—sometimes made absurdly, desperately amusing, following the precedent of West. It is an environment that continually threatens to swamp, destroy, or mindlessly absorb the hero into the great fœtid pudding of a society apparently without any public or communal values.

It is also an environment that is often felt to be demonized—populated by invisible forces alien to man. Norman Mailer (born 1923) comments explicitly on this conception of environment when he suggests:

> Life may now be intolerable to some other conception of Being—I would not know what else to call it but a plague—which is different from ourselves, more powerful perhaps, some conception so antagonistic to the Vision by which we try to discover our life that its presence has invaded our world, perhaps even our universe. The intent of such a plague is to deaden the soul of all of us, invite it to surrender.[67]

In Mailer's novel *An American Dream* (1965), the narrator Rojack liberates himself from the constrictions and enfeeblements of accepted models of reality by an act of murder: he breaks through to the demonic reality behind and gets a glimpse of looming supernatural powers threatening to destroy our world. "Yes, I had come to believe in grace and the lack of it, in the long finger of God and the swish of the Devil."[68] He maintains that civilization is "an invasion of the supernatural . . . and the price we have paid is to accelerate our sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us."[69] There is something innocent in this demonizing of reality, in that it refers all significant sources of action, all the aids and all the threats, to unknown forces outside man. Experience is divided in a fairly primitive way into a basically hostile "other" and a passive suppliant "self." One of the results of this is a great deal of hysteria and paranoia—innocence in the toils of nightmares of dreadful knowledge.

Another important writer who projects his own vision of a demonized reality is William Burroughs (born 1914). Starting from his own experience of drugs—an experience in which one's independent consciousness becomes helplessly subservient to an intruding alien power—Burroughs has projected a series of nightmare worlds in which various forms of alien hostile control seek to take over human autonomy. He often calls this power a "virus" that destroys the human host by living off it. He feels that contemporary civilization—from advertising to drugs, from bureaucrats to policemen to alien armies—is composed of forces seeking to take over the individual. Ultimately, in *Nova Express* (1964), he projects a vision of forces from alien planets coming to take over life on earth. This is his mythology. He has said:

> Heaven and Hell exist in my mythology. Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, into the hands of the virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving inner freedom, freedom from conditioning. I may add that none of the characters in my mythology are free. If they were free they would not still be in the mythological system, that is, in the cycle of conditioned action.[70]

The hideous figures who literally devour or assimilate helpless victims in *The Naked Lunch* (1959) are Burroughs' graphic comment on an environment in which malign and unnamable pressures come to encroach on the individual, bent on absorbing his identity and ending his freedom.

Burroughs' apparently idiosyncratic and private nightmare worlds are in fact very typical of American fiction, in which figures alternately yearn to be totally free of all conditioning forces, and fall into the horrified feeling that they are in fact totally in the thrall of conditioning forces. In American literature, dreams of total freedom alternate with nightmares of total coercion from without. The desire to get into that freedom that lies outside the "cycle of conditioned action" is one felt by most of the heroes in American fiction. That this is at bottom a desire to leave the world altogether Burroughs makes clear in one of *The Yage Letters* (1963), an exchange of correspondence with Allen Ginsberg: "WHAT SCARED YOU ALL INTO TIME? SCARED YOU ALL INTO YOUR BODIES? . . . COME OUT FOREVER. . . . ALL OUT OF TIME AND INTO SPACE. FOREVER."[71] It is a cry as old as American literature and, in its underlying spirit, close to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "New Adam and Eve" (*c.* 1844). It is that radical yearning on the part of American innocence to disentangle itself from the dirty complex world of experience. Forever.

The problematical nature of the relationship between the not yet initiated individual and society is approached in a different way by the Southern writer Carson McCullers (1917–67), who often explored that turbulent and disturbing period of life between childhood and adulthood. Thus her protagonists are often adolescents trembling rather uncertainly on the threshold of fuller experience. An example is Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). She is "an unjoined person who hung around in doorways, and she was afraid."[72] The doorway is the most appropriate place for someone who is neither totally outside society nor fully inside it—a place where we can find many American fictional characters. Frankie's disturbed notions at the prospect of the wedding of her brother, of which she wishes to be a "member," involve her in strange feelings and experiences in town; at one point she is taken by a drunken soldier to a bedroom from which she makes a desperate escape, still innocent but with the possible ugliness of experience beginning to seep into her consciousness. Basically her quandary is, where does she fit in, how is she related to other people? A crucial discussion with her friend, the coloured cook Berenice, brings this out. Frankie is worried by the idea that "We pass alongside each other and don't have any connection." Berenice answers that "The point is that we all caught. And we try in one way or another to widen ourself free." But Frankie says: "Yet at the same time you almost might use the word loose instead of caught. . . . I mean you walk around and you see all the people. And to me they look loose. . . . I mean you don't see what joins them up together." And this is her problem, a particular phrasing of a complex worry that besets many adolescents in American fiction. "But what is it all about? People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don't know what joins them."[73] Caught and loose—the feeling of being both conditioned and yet somehow unconnected—runs through much recent American fiction.

It seems in general that the environment in recent American fiction tends to be both unacceptable and unavoidable. The hero does not really live in it: he lives against it, or in despite of it, or in flight from it. But flight seems increasingly impossible. Up to Hemingway and Faulkner it still seemed possible for the hero to get right away from society for some restoring contact with unspoiled nature, a genuine immersion in wilderness, even if a temporary one. But for the modern American hero the limits of possible reality seem relentlessly urban. He may go and look at nature but he cannot get back into it. Saul Bellow's Herzog makes a retreat to his run-down home in the Berkshires; but this is a merely vestigial rural refuge, a dim echo of the classical American pastoral pattern in which the hero nourishes himself by a genuine re-communing with nature before returning to the demanding reality of society. The urbanized consciousness has been conditioned to the point where Nature appears to be a beautiful anachronism. One can catch refreshing glimpses of it, but it offers no habitations or refuges. There is no "trackless" wilderness left. This is a new development in American fiction, where previously wild or rural nature was felt to be the most genuine nature for the American hero. Such pre-civilized or non-civilized realms are now unattainable or not to be found. The city, with all its ramifying effects, is the primary reality.

In this connection it is interesting to note the increasing use of a word that first occurred in relation to the pessimistic theories of Henry Adams (1838–1918), the American historian, and that now attracts many contemporary American writers. The word is *entropy* and one simple dictionary definition of it is: "The irreversible tendency of a system, including the universe, toward increasing disorder and inertness; also, the final state predictable from this tendency." This is exactly what William Burroughs shows to be happening to the world: in his universe we see people first of all regressing to animal states, thence to vegetable conditions, and finally they are reduced to "lead"—base metal instead of agile human consciousness. The essential structure of Burroughs' novels is founded on a belief in the process of entropy. Similarly Norman Mailer has taken up the word: "It is the heart of existential logic that God's ultimate victory over the Devil is no more certain than the Devil's victory over God—either may conquer man and so give Being a distinctive Good or Evil, or indeed each may exhaust the other, until Being ceases to exist or sinks through seas of entropy into a Being less various, less articulated, less organic, more like plastic than the Nature we know."[74] This is a very American feeling.

One of the more interesting young American writers is Thomas Pynchon (born 1937). His first short story was called "Entropy" (1960) and his amazing novel *V* (1963) is really about a world in a state of entropy. "The only change is towards death," says one character, "early and late we are in decay . . . the body slows down, machines wear out, planets falter and loop, sun and stars gutter and smoke. . . ."[75] The book is full of dead, barren landscapes; people are shown as gradually being replaced by things and machines. The mysterious V (who is the object of the search in the book) is, among other things, a woman, most of whose essential parts and limbs have been replaced by artificial, non-organic constructions. V also stands for a mysterious place called Vheissu, of which one person says "there could have been no more entirely lifeless and empty space anywhere on earth." It is a "dream of annihilation,"[76] and so is the whole novel. We find the theme pursued even in details, many of them madly, wildly comic. For instance, there is a doctor who specializes in "the introduction of inert substances into the living face," and after one character has a bad accident this doctor fits him out with a nose bridge of ivory, a cheekbone of silver, and a paraffin and celluloid chin. It is black comedy, but all part of a world that seems increasingly bent on "alignment with the inanimate."[77] The main social group in the book is referred to as "the Whole Sick Crew," and one of their parties is described in the following way: "The party, as if it were inanimate after all, unwound like a clock's mainspring towards the edges of the chocolate room, seeking some easing of its own tension, some equilibrium."[78] That, in little, is what is happening to the whole unwinding world of the book, a world receding to the inanimate, a world in a state of entropy. There is a traditionally innocent figure involved in the strange adventures of the book, the *schlemiel* Benny Profane, who, rather like a latter-day Buster Keaton, has terrible difficulty in dealing with the encroaching things of the world. But the encroachment is inexorable and there is no room for his innocence in the world. He is last seen running with a girl "through the abruptly absolute night" toward the sea, in which, one assumes, he will find his final release from a world of hostile and bruising objects. His last words are, "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddam thing."[79]

In all these books one notices that there is very little sense either of any normative community or of any shared reality. Bellow once noted the lack in American writers of "a firm sense of a common world, a coherent community, a genuine purpose in life." But (as he added) "no one can will these things into being and establish them by fiat."[80] When Augie March says "how seldom two imaginations coincide,"[81] he is putting his finger on a condition that particularly impresses American writers. Each one seems to project his own private phantasy or version of the world, as when John Hawkes (born 1925) speaks of "that absolute need to create from the imagination a totally new and necessary fictional landscape or visionary world."[82] In his own work Hawkes writes about Germany and England without having visited them, but the novels set in these countries are really about the state of his American imagination in the mid-20th century. His novel *Second Skin* (1964) is about imaginary islands in the Atlantic and the Pacific, and it is interesting to note quite traditional American preoccupations revealing themselves in this highly idiosyncratic phantasy. The hero, Skipper, is an innocent who has to encounter many manifestations of the evil of the world. The two islands in his life represent a dream world of pastoral bliss (the Pacific island) and an actual world of brutal destruction and evil (the Atlantic island). When he sets out for the good, wandering island of the Pacific, which ordinary ships cannot see, he is making that classic American effort to leave the bleak, dark world of harsh experience and sickening knowledge for a blue and sunny world of the imagination. In the world of pain and malevolence he is continually having to put on different clothes and uniforms, second skins, whereas on his Pacific island he can go almost naked. In the first world his skin is painfully tattooed, a scar that his skin bears in evidence of his destructive and nightmarish involvement in the world of human evil and complexity. In the other world an iguana fastens its claws into the skin of Skipper's native lover. He tries to pull it off but it cannot be moved. However, when they wait long enough the iguana releases its hold and leaves of its own accord. It would seem that sheer patience is all that is required to deal with the friction of existence (all those attacks on the human skin) in Skipper's dream world. The book is a brilliant one, not least in its ability to suggest that the Pacific dream world might enjoy a superior reality to the hallucinatory brutalities of the cold Atlantic world.

However, the problem of where innocence can flee to in its horror at the violence of the man-made world remains one that American writers continually return to, but never finally solve. One of the most remarkable comic fictions written since the war is Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), a novel that is about the last war, but also more generally about modern American society. The army life can also serve as a metaphor for the lunacy of social life. Both are supposed to be models of order, clarity, rules, laws, reasons; both, however, seem to be the crystallizing of the extreme of unreason, so that they offer the spectacle of chaos appearing in the grotesque garb of order. It is this world that the innocent hero

Yossarian has to negotiate and finally escape from, if he can. It is typical of his experience in the army during war-time that, waking up, he "opened his eyes upon a world boiling in chaos in which everything was in proper order."[83] This is what he means by the "spinning reasonableness" of his world; only paradox can do justice to the systematized insanity of this world at war. But these conditions, and Yossarian's reaction, are not unique to war conditions. They are very like what we can find in many American novels about society in times of apparent peace. Thus, for instance, Yossarian's paranoia, the feeling of some implacable unjustified hostility aimed at his self, is very common in contemporary American fiction. The following example is comic, yet horribly true.

> "They're trying to kill me," Yossarian told him calmly.
> "No one's trying to kill you," Clevinger cried.
> "Then why are they shooting at me?" Yossarian asked.
> "They're shooting at everyone," Clevinger answered. "They're trying to kill everyone."[84]

"They" can be understood as standing for much more than the enemy forces.

Yossarian reveals exactly the disinclination to be a victim of circumstances, the resistance to the conditioning forces, that William Burroughs writes about, and that characters such as Augie March act out in their lives. "That men would die was a matter of necessity; *which* men would die, though, was a matter of circumstance, and Yossarian was willing to be the victim of anything but circumstance."[85] Yossarian's way of handling his plane on a bombing mission is exactly like the action of many other American heroes. "He had decided to live forever or die in the attempt, and his only mission each time he went up was to come down alive"[86]: he "used to come barreling in over the target from all directions and every height, climbing and diving and twisting and turning so steeply and sharply that it was all the pilots of the other five planes could do to stay in formation with him. . . ."[87] This is the same energy of avoidance and self-preservation that we find in other American novels, the instinct to hold on to the self in the midst of all the attacks of modern life. Yossarian has enough brains to be afraid, and it is his fear that keeps him moving. He will never "trust the evasive action out of the target area to anybody else. . . . Yossarian was the best man in the group at evasive action."[88] Just so, Augie March is supreme at evasion, and both Yossarian and he and many other American heroes demonstrate tremendous adroitness, adaptability, and ultimate elusiveness, in clinging to their own selves against the all-threatening, opposing "them." These are open characters in closed and closing societies. They want to expand and explore in an enclosing crushing world.

A problem for Yossarian, as indeed for many another idealistic innocent American hero, is the complete instability and reversibility of all operative and accepted values. Traditional values are effortlessly inverted by their apparent custodians. "They" can do whatever they like with you, because "they" can always twist the official rhetoric so that you can always be put in the position they want you in. There is no fixed justice to invoke and appeal to, because "they" can always invoke Catch-22, which in effect is a clause justifying the infinite adaptability of all values in the interests of ruthless coercion of the individual. For instance, Catch-22 "specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind."[89] People who have flown an excessive number of raids may go crazy with the strain; but if they ask to be taken off the flights they give proof of their sanity, so they are considered fit enough to continue flying. By this "logic" the authorities can keep anyone flying as long as they like.

Yossarian, against all this, affirms only one sure value—life itself: "What else is there?" It is indeed a problem for the American hero that, although there is often an idealist buried inside him who would like to affirm positive values, in the world in which he finds himself he can affirm only the one basic value of staying alive and in possession of the self. The end of this book is again entirely typical of contemporary American fiction. There is only one gesture the hero can make: "I can turn my back on the whole damned mess and start running."[90] It is indeed the archetypal American gesture, the hero simply quitting a society in which he finds it impossible to put his own ideals and values into action.

But where can Yossarian run to, in a world at war? Is his flight anything more than a purely negative move? He claims that it is: "I'm not running away from my responsibilities. I'm running *to* them. There's nothing negative about running away to save my life."[91] Indeed there is not, at one level. But once the life is saved, what then? Once again we have a figure who cannot find anything positive to do with his life, his self, except—like Augie March—preserve it. Yossarian intends to head for Sweden, but its nominal neutrality will hardly differentiate it from the constricting and baffling world of aggression and imprisonment from which Yossarian is in flight. And we never see him realizing himself or taking up his responsibilities in Sweden. The end of the book is aptly equivocal and unresolved. "Yossarian jumped. Nately's whore was hiding just outside the door. The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off."[92] The world, in various forms, is always waiting just outside the door with a knife. This American hero's best exploit is an avoiding leap.

This matter of how such recent American novels end is worth a moment's consideration. In general they end with the hero either running or jumping away from, rather than toward, anything; or else he is immobilized, trapped, or exhausted. During the body of the book the hero characteristically keeps on the move; this continual movement may be flight, and at the same time it may be experienced as a quest. One gets the impression that perhaps the only aim is simply to keep moving: not to get trapped, not to become inert and inanimate, not to die. The quest is for the sake of the movement that produces the feeling of being animate and alive. But to succeed in the quest would be to lose this motive for momentum, to relapse back into unconsciousness or death. Thus the quest must never be successful. It would seem that the American hero in his continual moving is searching for something that he dare not find. It is the only way to stay alive.

Again, the typical hero often feels a great deal of frustrated idealism. Often, when he seems to be most cynical and nihilistic, he is still basically an innocent trying to hide his shock and pain at discovering that the world offers no scope for his better feelings; whence those many unresolved and inconclusive endings. Occasionally characters try to make peace with society by accepting some sort of honourable role, such as that of teacher or doctor, but as often as not these remain dreams (as they do in the work of Bellow). The hero seldom comes into full and satisfactory possession of the identity he seeks, or the home he longs for, or the social role he would fain embrace. The counter-movement of rejection, away from all structures and stabilities, proves stronger. In this the American hero is not so different from, say, some of D. H. Lawrence's heroes, who reject society only to find no alternative world to work in. But in Lawrence's novels the hero often puts his faith in the sustaining value of the true relationship. But although the American hero may often talk of love, he seems so sealed off, so basically separate from everything and everyone, that he seldom enters into any really significant relationships. There are a lot of sexual encounters in recent American fiction, but very few significant marriages. Indeed, the characters often long for a human relationship precisely to the extent that they feel themselves to be so alienated that they can never experience one. A very apt image for this sealed-off state is produced by Walker Percy in his novel *The Last Gentleman* (1966). The innocent hero in this book has that typical American problem when it comes to wishing to become part of any social group: "He either disappeared into the group or turned his back on it."[93] Submergence or flight: these are the old alternatives for the American hero. But this one finds his perfect private world in a truck with a plexiglass look-out dome. "Now here surely is a good way to live nowadays, said he . . . mobile yet at home . . . in the world yet not of the world, sampling the particularities of place yet cabined off from the sadness of place . . . peeping out at the doleful woods of Spotsylvania through the cheerful plexiglass of Sheboygan."[94] That vehicle is as revealing an image for the consciousness of the contemporary American hero as one is likely to find. In the world, yet not of the world: it explains why there is often a lot of talk in American fiction, but very little true communication; more collisions than contacts; more separations than commitments.

The American hero, then, communicates most intensely with himself. This was true of Huck Finn and it has become more obvious in subsequent fiction. The hero is a monologuist who would often like to enter into dialogue with another person but seldom manages it. Here again, one of Saul Bellow's characters—perhaps the most famous character in post-war American fiction—is exemplary: Herzog, who writes letters to the world but does not send them, who is involved in a "dream of communication" that only cuts him off from the world even more. As we can see in the work of Saul Bellow and many other writers, commitments and relationships threaten the end of movement for the American hero; they involve arrest and fixity, and above all the American hero wants to keep moving. If he does come to a halt, it is usually a halt in a state of radical isolation and apartness, like Herzog (despite the imminent appearance of an improbable girl-friend). Bernard Malamud (born 1914) is unusual in showing characters who come to maturity only when they abandon movement and take on responsibilities and burdensome relationships, particularly paternity. It is a key part of every Malamud novel that the hero has to accept the nominal role of father before he becomes an actual father. Only when Levin, in *A New Life* (1961), has agreed to take on the responsibility for Pauline Gilley's children, who are not his own, does he learn that he is to become a father in his own right. All Malamud's books are about growing up. His heroes seek "a new life," and it turns out to be the life of adult maturity. Like Yakov Bok in *The Fixer* (1966), many of Malamud's characters find real freedom and fulfilment only in imprisoning circumstances. They learn to accept their fixed position in the mesh of society and the unavoidable web of history. Somewhere between submergence and flight, Malamud's heroes find their true selves. This represents a modification of a basic American pattern.

It seems to become ever more clear that a sort of inner dialectic between urgency of movement and desire for stillness in many American heroes is responsible for their characteristic inner tensions. The hero's temporary contentment at the end of *Herzog* (1964) is due in part to a total acceptance of prone inertia. "Walking over notes and papers, he lay down on his Recamier couch. As he stretched out, he took a long breath, and then he lay."[95] He is happy because he has given up his habit of writing unsent letters. He has abandoned even the dream of communication that possessed him before and that goaded him into outbursts of energy. In fact the novel starts in stillness as well: "He went on taking stock, lying face down on the sofa."[96] We read also that "one corner of his mind remained open to the external world," but one feels that the corner is diminishing, that he is really receding into a prone and unapproachable remoteness. Despite the good resolutions about re-entering the world that he makes before the end, you can feel that he really wants never to get up off that lonely couch. Bellow himself intended something more positive. In an interview he said about the book:

> My novel deals with the humiliating sense that results from the American mixture of private concerns and intellectual interests. . . . To me, a significant theme of *Herzog* is the imprisonment of the individual in a shameful and impotent privacy. He feels humiliated by it; he struggles continually with it; and he comes to realize at last that what he considered his intellectual 'privilege' has proved to be another form of bondage. . . . Any *Bildungsroman*—and *Herzog* is . . . a *Bildungsroman*—concludes with the first step. The first *real* step. Any man who has rid himself of superfluous ideas in order to take that first step has done something significant.[97]

"The first step": in a sense not quite intended by Bellow, this phrase points to the abiding theme and preoccupation of much American literature. In one of his poems, Whitman wrote:

> The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
> I have hardly gone further and hardly wish'd to go any farther.[98]

The first step into the world, the first step of innocence out of the confines of its own unconsciousness and toward, or over, the perimeter of the world of experience: here indeed is one of the most recurrent American subjects. The first step may be a source of awe, pleasure, wonder, and delight; but it can also very easily lead to extreme reactions of horror, revulsion, terror, and flight. Very few of the "first steps" in American literature are steps toward a satisfying and acceptable integration into the prevailing social or domestic structures. Just consider some of the more recent novels that have been mentioned: Rojack setting out on some South American phantasy trip (*An American Dream*); Yossarian jumping out from under the knife (*Catch-22*); Stencil seeking without intention to find (*V*); and Herzog relapsing into inertia in his isolated and crumbling house—these are some of the most characteristic postures or gestures of the contemporary American hero, and not one of them involves another person.

Readers of older American literature will be quite prepared for them. They are all versions of that time-honoured refusal by American innocence of any of the offered modes of existence in the given world. The American hero often affirms the value of sheer existence: he says Yes to creation, and at the same time he usually says No to society. The tensions arising from the interpenetration of these affirming and negating energies is responsible for much that is rich and engaging in American literature. But this rejection of the actually existent forms of reality by the innocent American hero, and often by his basically innocent creator, poses one great problem. As Ralph Ellison realized, in the meditations of his Invisible Man: "Step outside the narrow borders of what men call reality and you step into chaos . . . or imagination."[99] Innocence cannot preserve itself as innocence; the need to choose is inexorable, and even a refusal to decide on any one way is in itself a decision. The step into reality often seems to be a step into death, and the innocent figures in American literature often draw back from any further venturing in that direction. But the step away from reality can only be a step toward the realm of pure chaos or the realm of pure imagination. This is the problem for the innocent character, and it may also be the problem for his innocent creator. For it seems that those American writers who do not transcend the innocent perspective of their central characters remain imprisoned themselves, unable to take a second step in art just as their characters are so often unable to take a second step in life. J. D. Salinger (born 1919), it could be argued, is a case in point, and it is something liable to happen to any writer who attributes an absolute value to innocence in itself. It is those American writers who strive to *place* innocence, to put it in a wider perspective (writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, James; and as various as Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Malamud), who in the process lose their own innocence and discover their art.

III

The fate of innocence as projected in American literature that has been sketched in the preceding pages is clearly related at every point to the changing social and economic conditions in which Americans have found themselves. Paradisal expectations were from the beginning crossed with social and economic reality. The painter Thomas Cole (1801–48) explored the "wantonness and barbarity" of the frontiersman's wielding of the axe; and throughout the 19th century the pitfalls of civilization into which the innocent stumbled were more likely to be American than European. Although Henry James pitted the innocent American businessman against the sophisticated, devious, and corrupt products of an old European society, that businessman was himself a brash product of a free-enterprise theory and practice, and was no innocent when it came to buying and selling. In *The Golden Bowl* (1904) it is the rich Americans who in the end buy up and dispose of the sophisticated Europeans. An earlier American fictional tradition had contrasted the Yankee villagers, representing innocence, with the Yankee pedlar, representing urban knowledge and competence. The development of a free-enterprise industrial economy turned the pedlar into the successful businessman who in one sense subsumes the villager because he remains an innocent with respect to the subtle social and cultural modes of the Old World, even though in another context he is the wily eastern financier threatening the honest farmers of the West. In several of the novels of Willa Cather (1873–1947) we see him in the latter role, for the Populist movement—related to the exhaustion of free land in the West and the increasingly difficult position of the farmer in a competitive industrial economy—had a considerable effect on her thinking. So Cather came to look back on the pioneering days as the period of America's lost glory, and to regard commercial and industrial progress with suspicion, just as Mark Twain did in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883).

One respect in which the American businessman inherits the innocence of the early Americans is in his belief in progress. As early as 1616 Captain John Smith, in *A Description of New England*, stated the gospel of the self-made man: "Who can desire more content that hath small means or but only his merit to advance his fortune . . . ?" From rags to riches, from log-cabin to White House, early established itself as an American myth appropriate to a new society free of the rigid class barriers of the Old World. The alternation of dreams of total freedom with nightmares of total coercion from without (which we have already seen as characteristic of so much American literature) is part of the paradox of free enterprise and the self-made man. Free enterprise is "free," but in its mature phase it requires conformity to fixed social patterns, respectability, and conventionality to achieve its ends. In this sense, to be successfully free is to be a slave. A common theme in Hollywood films used to be the aspiring young businessman and his wife invited to dinner by his boss, who is sharply on the look-out during dinner for the slightest deviation from conventional, socially accepted thoughts and behaviour. Further, not only does the free-enterprise system demand conformity (that is, non-free action) from its successful practitioner, but it also imposes on the unsuccessful, on the drop-outs, a humiliating thralldom. This is one of the themes of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). The modern desire to contract out of the world of business success, which is a world of slavery masquerading as freedom, represents from one point of view a re-assertion of the old American dream, to get away from an over-structured, artificial society to nature, to the wilderness, to the unorganized innocence of uncodified experience. This re-assertion increasingly uses comic or fantastic means, as in J. P. Donleavy's novel *A Singular Man* (1963).

Mark Twain, who thought that it was American to believe in progress but who, looking at the realities of the Gilded Age, found himself increasingly unable to do so, shows how the twin myths of innocence and progress (originally a product of the Enlightenment, with its optimistic belief in the ability to start from scratch with only reason and nature to guide you, and to move on toward the ideal society) became separated under the impact of industrial capitalism. The modern American innocent does *not* believe in progress, which for him is enslaving and destructive. In a sense, of course, he is not innocent at all: he knows enough about the stultification involved in conventional social and economic life to want to contract out of it altogether; whereas the businessman, trapped in his office and acting out the cosy American business mythology of work, family, and the American way of life, is the real innocent, because he does not see what his life is really like. James showed remarkable foresight in making some of his businessmen innocents.

The importance of role-taking in modern American fiction is also related to the increasing awareness of the degree to which society demands of its members that they should act out roles. The innocent self-discovery in a world of spontaneous experience that the American dream originally demanded is thus not only impossible but directly counter to the requirements of society. So the real villain becomes not the wicked capitalist of the muck-raking novels of the early 20th century or of the left-wing novels of the 1930s, but the personality-less role-taker, the Invisible Man. The search for identity was originally (and logically) bound up with the search for freedom, but it turns out that the kind of freedom involved in a free-enterprise economy destroys identity. The tension between the individual and the community that we have seen as a fruitful part of the American imagination has become more than a tension; it has become a bitter opposition. "Togetherness" is an obscene word for many Americans, because it is the invention of advertisers intent on foisting a cloyingly false picture of uniform social happiness on what they significantly call "consumers." Yet the search for the true community—of beatniks, of tramps, of free-lovers, of contemplators: the views change with kaleidoscopic speed—goes on with increasing desperation. Its one unchanging criterion is that it should be right outside the cosy community of the respectable and the successful.

The American dream of innocence has never by itself produced great literature. It is only when it is challenged by reality that first the tensions and then the contradiction stimulate the literary imagination. Gatsby's American dream was of wealth, power, and possessions: a free American, living in a world of social mobility unknown to Europe, could achieve these three and could link them with success in personal relations because no other criterion was left to him. Here again we get a curious perversion (or development) of innocence. America, with its social mobility, promises great wealth and social position to anyone who will work hard for it. Without an admitted class structure, wealth then becomes both the means of power and the standard by which success is judged. We return to the paradox of the innocent businessman, the simple-minded *entrepreneur*.

There are, of course, other paradoxes. The dream of innocence for long coexisted with the fact of slavery, and nowhere is the shadow of this paradox more effectively in evidence than in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). The South had its own problems, and the intolerable tensions—produced by the coexistence of an aristocratic tradition, the ugly realities of a plantation economy, and negro slavery with its aftermath—produced their own literary genre, Southern Gothic, a genre that can be defined to include writers as different as William Faulkner and Carson McCullers. Here, too, the theme is often the American one of the search for identity or for communication in a world that history has left in some way stranded or distorted or fantastic. That history should come into the American dream is itself a paradox, for that dream began as an escape from history and from society, from both time and place. Time and place have their revenge on those who try to deny them, and one way of looking at

American literature is to see it as the record—shaped by the historical and social facts themselves—of the troubled discovery of this truth.

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CHAPTER 9

Spanish Literature after 1898: from Programme to Mystique

Donald L. Shaw*

I

The story of the relationship between the writer and society in Spain in the 20th century begins not with a book by one of the members of the Generation of 1898, but with Benito Pérez Galdós's play *Electra* in 1901. In this play, with its sharp criticism of the traditionalist mentality, we see a wholly unexpected return to the polemical aggressiveness of Pérez Galdós's work in the decade after the upheaval of 1868. Its effect was galvanic; 10,000 copies were sold in two days. In the furore that followed, the conservative government of Azcárraga fell and gave place to a liberal one under Sagasta. It was the first and only dramatic change effected by a work of literature in the struggle for national regeneration.

A symbol of the solidarity of the Generation of 1898 with Pérez Galdós (1843–1920) is to be seen in the founding, by Baroja, Azorín, Maeztu, and others, of the short-lived magazine *Electra* (1901), and their attendance at the banquet in 1904 in honour of Pérez Galdós's next, almost equally critical play, *El abuelo* (The Ancestor). Also present, by a happy chance, were Ramón Pérez de Ayala and José Ortega y Gasset, who 25 years later were with Gregorio Marañón to set up the ill-fated Agrupación al Servicio de la República, the last major attempt at direct intervention in society by writers and intellectuals before the outbreak of the Civil War. Not surprisingly, Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936), in a letter to the *Mercure de France* of February 1904, had mentioned that Pérez Galdós was being talked about as a possible leader behind whom younger socially involved writers could rally. In fact no such grouping took place. Apart from the brief alliance of "Los Tres," mentioned below, and general collaboration with the radical politico-literary magazine *Revista Nueva* (1899), each writer pursued his extra-literary activities independently.*

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* Reader in Hispanic Studies, University of Edinburgh.

About the turn of the century, Unamuno, although he had broken his earlier affiliation with organized Socialism, was still close to being a Marxist and still actively engaged in left-wing political activities. Azorín (1894–1967), who had recently translated some works of Kropotkin, was publishing furiously combative articles attacking parliamentary democracy and the power of the state. Ramiro de Maeztu (1874–1936) was extolling the practical virtues of Socialism and, like the others, toying with Anarchism. Pío Baroja (1872–1956), though less directly committed politically, was calling in the press for positive economic and social policies, the emancipation of women, divorce, and other advanced measures to be carried through if necessary by "a liberal, technocratic, and anti-parliamentary dictatorship."[1] Finally in 1901 Baroja, Azorín, and Maeztu ("Los Tres") published a joint manifesto calling for radical economic measures to hasten the regeneration of Spain, and soon, with moral support from Unamuno, they launched a combined attack on the authorities in Málaga, in whom they saw typified the administrative inefficiency and immorality of the period.

Initially, then, we find ourselves with a picture of a group of young writers, chiefly of lower-middle-class origins. Lay educated (in contrast to Ayala and Ortega in the next generation), they were university-trained intellectuals without private means, entirely dependent on their academic and intellectual skill, and initially were orientated toward joining the relatively new professional class. Azorín trained as a lawyer, Baroja as a doctor, Unamuno became a professor, and Antonio Machado (1875–1939) a teacher. Already drawn towards politico-social commitment before the disaster of 1898 itself, they had at first extreme socialist/anarchist leanings. Their social role at this stage was clearly to provide the rationale of a peaceful liberal revolution centring on the ideal of "Europeanizing" Spain. Their aim was to withdraw their readers' allegiance from the prevailing elite and the accepted social structure, chiefly by attacking the traditionalist ideology in the name of which both political parties in practice ruled. *Europeización* represented a new social myth and a new socio-economic structure designed to overcome the frustrations that the defeat of 1898 had brought into the open.

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* Since social involvement is recognized as one of the conventional distinctions between the Generation of 1898 and the *modernistas* who were their exact contemporaries, it is proposed to restrict consideration here to the former writers. This is not, of course, to suggest that the aestheticism of the *modernistas* cannot be related to its social context. But investigation of such a relationship must be judged to fall outside the scope of this chapter.

Before long, however, we notice a significant shift of attitude. With Unamuno in the lead, the young writers became rapidly disillusioned with national regeneration. They increasingly withdraw from left-wing affiliations and direct social reformism. They now concern themselves much more with pure literary creation, and reinterpret the problem of Spain in terms of a crisis of national mentality, and of individual beliefs and ideals. From now on the main emphasis in their work moves to the search, already initiated by Ángel Ganivet in *España filosófica contemporánea* (1888), for *ideas madres* (new guiding principles).[2] The desire to reshape the socio-economic structure of Spain gives way to the hope of reshaping its normative structure.

The result is striking. Although the basic problems of Spanish society were poverty, rural oppression, and stagnation, hardly a single novel of the Generation of 1898 was set in the slums, and not a single fictional hero belonged to the peasant class. The major socially important processes in Spain after 1917—the decay of party government, military unrest, inflation, the collapse of civil order, the failure of industrial expansion, the drift to dictatorship, and underlying all the rise of the organized revolutionary Left—find almost no reflection in creative writing. Why is this? The answer, if it can be found at all, must lie in the state of Spanish society itself.

In 1898 Spain was still an undynamic society. Wealth and employment were concentrated in the primary (agricultural) sector of the economy. Before 1909 there was no adequately organized urban working-class movement. Social—as distinct from political—stability had been achieved at the expense of flexibility, with practically no increase in the opportunities for social mobility. Government, based on managed elections, was oligarchic. Its ideology, liberal or conservative, was in practice conditioned by the so-called *castizo* (pure) ideals of Catholicism, nationalism, and respect for the grandeur of Spain's imperial past. The position of the middle class was static. Outside the Basque provinces and Catalonia there was no rising technologically orientated managerial or entrepreneurial bourgeoisie; no meritocracy threatened the established hierarchical structure. The small self-recruiting middle class from which the Generation of 1898 sprang was privileged, but not decision-taking. It presented no serious challenge to minority political control.

Although the war of 1898 administered a shock, it brought about no change in institutions or power-groupings, still less an effective revision of the prevailing social myth. Spain was not involved in World War I, which in the rest of Europe shattered the older social framework. Although after the General Strike of 1917 a phase of political change that led through dictatorship to the Republic was under way, it was not accompanied by corresponding socio-economic change. In the form of General Franco's regime the old order in fact survived until the late 1950s, when wholly new factors—including mass emigration of workers to Europe, massive foreign investment, and the development of a huge tourist industry—began the slow transformation that is still in progress.

The Generation of 1898 found themselves strategically situated at a position in the social structure particularly subject to the kind of stresses and pressures that lead to the re-examination of social myths and the postulation of alternative ones. Seeing in creative writing an instrument for social reform, they revolutionized political journalism in Spain and made the essay for a time the dominating literary genre. Their programme included agricultural reform, industrialization, commercial expansion, the advancement of state lay education, as well as an end to Basque and Catalan separatism and to the oligarchic system of government with its authoritarian bias.

But before long the Generation of 1898 found itself faced by four insurmountable obstacles. The first was the economic problem itself: the poverty of Spain's natural endowment. This has remained the intractable factor inhibiting industrial take-off and the consequent acceleration of social change. The second was the enormous power and intransigence of the countervailing social mechanisms protecting the status quo. Thirdly, the Generation of 1898 was unable to surrender its freedom from party or bureaucratic attachment. The only possible new socio-political myth was that of Socialism, and none of the group could wholeheartedly accept this. Finally, lacking inherited wealth they possessed no significant extra-literary resources. It was almost impossible to find a commercial publisher who would bring out a work of serious literature at his own risk. Only purveyors of entertainment to the popular market, such as the brothers Quintero or Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, could make large fortunes. Almost all Unamuno's books up to World War I were published at his own expense. As late as 1907 Baroja was offered only 500 pesetas for the serialization of *César o nada* (Caesar or Nothing) in a popular newspaper. Journalism alone offered a means of earning one's living by original writing. But here there was another obstacle. When Azorín at length succeeded in becoming roving correspondent of the top Madrid daily *El Imparcial*, he was abruptly dismissed for the fiery social protest of his articles on poverty and oppression in rural Andalusia.

Thus, disillusioned and frustrated, the Generation of 1898 turned increasingly to the typical escape mechanism of those who have lost hope of modifying external circumstances. By postulating the primacy of ideals and beliefs over social forces, they were reverting not only to a supposed method of national regeneration more congenial to them as creative writers, but also—although a residual reformist preoccupation remained—to one that had no direct social implications.

II

Pío Baroja's central novel *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911; The Tree of Knowledge) not only belongs to the half-dozen major novels of the Generation of 1898 but stands out among them because of its autobiographical content and its direct reference to the catastrophe of 1898 itself (Part IV, Ch. 1). Its themes are the social frustration and the spiritual malaise of a young doctor, Andrés Hurtado, one of the most authentically representative heroes of the Generation of 1898. The structural organization of the work, on the one hand as a "document" of the times, on the other as a commentary on them expressed through Hurtado's conduct and outlook, throws into relief the position outlined above. What makes it such a key novel for our purpose is precisely the way in which it illustrates the divergence between the terms in which the Spanish social problem is posed and those in which Hurtado's responses to it are described.

The first three chapters describe the intellectual and social situation of which Hurtado was a product. The charlatanism of his teachers at the old university of Madrid where the novel opens, together with the egotism, despotism, parasitism, and disunity of his family, are designed to underline the intellectual indigence of Spain and the absence of a shared collective ideal at the level of the basic social unit as well as in the nation at large. The title of Chapter 4, "En el aislamiento" (In Isolation), emphasizes Hurtado's rejection of the social pattern so far revealed. At this point Baroja might, in a fashionable phrase, have "found his identity" by identifying his hero, and thereby himself, with a particular social group or party, seen as representing a force for progress. What we see instead is the novelist deliberately stressing his lack of social identity by concentrating his attention, here as elsewhere in his work, on figures who are isolated from society, marginal, or even anti-social. In contrast to the solidly integrated "establishment" writers of the late 19th century, who even in their social criticism were directly reaffirming the bourgeois value-system (the aberrations alone of which they attacked), Baroja deliberately embraces the role of a social outsider, a destructive critic striking out with uncommitted (and to that extent futile) impartiality at every established institution and class.

Two classic features of his technique indicate a correlation between the narrative structure typical of Baroja's novels and his concept of their social function. These are the plethora of characters, noticed by almost all critics, and the equally obtrusive restlessness of the heroes and heroines, which carries them hither and thither across the face of Spain and even of Europe. The first eight chapters of Part II, for example, introduce 28 new characters in 39 pages or so. Only one of these, Lulú the heroine, has an important part to play. Similarly Hurtado moves from Madrid (in the centre of Spain) to Valencia (in the east) and to Alcolea (almost in the south): from, that is, the capital to a large provincial city and later to a small regional market-town with its closed village-type social structure. This technique, which had appeared first in *Camino de perfección* (1902; Road to Perfection) and its companion novel, Azorín's *La voluntad* (1902; The Will), where the route is from Madrid through Toledo to Yecla, is deliberately aimed at presenting a social cross-section: metropolitan, urban, and rural. The result is vastly to extend the social range of the characters who appear. Here they vary from the prostitutes and starving slum-dwellers whom Hurtado meets during his work in Madrid, through the peasants and rural *petite bourgeoisie*, to the urban middle class itself and (in passing) the aristocracy. The stance adopted by Baroja toward them is invariably critical.

His criticism operates at three levels: the human, the national, and the social. At the level of mankind in general, Baroja restates his simple Spencerian view of life as a fierce biological struggle (see Part II, Ch. 9, "La crueldad universal" [Universal Cruelty]). In this struggle the individual's chief weapon is instinctive selfishness, an evil in Baroja's view so intrinsically a part of human nature that it is hardly worth passing judgment on it. What matters here is the consequence: "What makes society evil is man's egoism, and egoism is a natural fact, it is a necessity of life."[3] Society is evil primarily because it reflects an evil inherent in the human condition.

At the national level the specific defects of Spanish society reflect those of Spaniards as a race. These, Baroja suggests, are ignorance, envy, vanity, and fanaticism, which manifest themselves socially in, first, the complete absence of social co-operation, seen above all in Alcolea, which is deliberately presented as a microcosm of Spanish social behaviour: "The town had not the slightest social sense. . . . There was no co-operation; no one knew how to use or could use the strength that comes from joining together. . . . Because of its lack of collective instinct the town had been overtaken by ruin."[4] Secondly, Baroja insists on the general economic and other consequences: agriculture stagnates or retrogresses; industry ignores technological advances (for instance, the inventor Ibarra is forced to emigrate); politics remains dominated by *caciquismo* (bossism). Finally normal human behaviour and social intercourse is frustrated by the *moral absurdo*, which not only provokes Baroja to a savage chapter of direct commentary (Part V, Ch. 7, "Sexualidad y pornografía") but also underlies the selection of a number of references and incidents, ranging from mention of the erotomania of Queen Isabel and that of the Duchess described by Venancia at one end of the social scale, *via* the "respectable" prostitution of Aracil's wife and Lulú's sister, to the pathetic plight of the street-girls.

At the purely social level Baroja concentrates on the simple conflict of the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Most of the major representative characters grouped around Hurtado are simply designed to illustrate the repulsive, or merely stupid and narrow, outlook of the dominant middle class. The central figure is Aracil, with his worship of money and success for their own sake, his cynical conservatism, and the moral elasticity that allows him to exploit even his wife's adultery. Flanking him and his rural counterpart Sánchez stand Hurtado's father, his brothers, and the family's relatives in Valencia, whose pattern of life and outlook (caricatured in Don Blas Carreño of Alcolea) is that of the *rentier* class: petty and conformist.

But this attack on the directing classes is not balanced by championship of the workers. The money-dominated attitudes of the middle class are complemented by the slave mentality of the poor, which fills Hurtado repeatedly with frustrated anger at the dull passivity with which both the rural and the urban masses accept injustice and exploitation. In contrast with Blasco Ibáñez's crusading anarchist apostles striving to replace the myth of middle-class and clerical leadership with belief in rebellion, social justice, and scientific progress—as in *La bodega* (1906; The Fruit of the Vine)—or with Concha Espina's interpretation of the class-struggle in pseudo-Christian terms with the rich as Pharisees and the poor as the children of God in *El metal de los muertos* (1920; Death Dread), Baroja holds no brief for the underdog. The people are shown as actually collaborating with the processes that consolidate middle-class domination. Only once does Baroja attribute this to a lack of class-consciousness on the part of the oppressed, with a strikingly accurate forecast: " 'The truth is that if the people understood it all,' thought Hurtado, 'they would get themselves killed trying to bring about a social revolution.' "[5]

Why then did he not devote more energy to fostering the growth of that consciousness by means of the novel? Here we return to the central enigma. Why, if the Generation of 1898 were all originally committed to social reform, was there no major element of social protest and purposive social criticism in their work? Why was it left to purveyors such as Blasco Ibáñez, or to minor talents such as Felipe Trigo and Concha Espina? An analysis of Hurtado's attitudes is enlightening.

His deviance from conventional social norms is apparent from the outset. In the first chapter he is described as an "enemy of the bourgeoisie," and later as resisting pressure to "accept the ideas and way of life of a young Madrid upper-class man-about-town."[6] Isolated from his family as a result, he gravitates rapidly toward (purely intellectual) revolutionary attitudes. As a fourth-year undergraduate he is infected with the romantic humanitarian anarchism (*anarquismo espiritual*) already noticed in the early outlook of Unamuno, Azorín, and Maeztu, as well as of Baroja himself. At the height of his exasperation in Alcolea, his revolutionary aspirations reappear: " 'How beautiful a revolution would be,' said Andrés"[7]; and later: "With what pleasure he would have shut up his books if there had been something important to do; something like setting fire to the town and rebuilding it."[8] Yet, whenever these aspirations are mentioned, they are immediately followed by emphasis on Hurtado's total lack of confidence in any positive course of action. His anarchism is carefully described as "without practical application"; his advice to the young republican extremists in Alcolea is to emigrate; his social attitude throughout remains simply one of ethical indignation.

Why is this? It is not merely that Hurtado has no political affiliation, and hence no ready-made solution to advocate; nor is it merely that his consciousness of the dimensions of the problem undermines his confidence in the efficacy of individual effort. Ultimately Hurtado's passive negativism in the face of the "social iniquity" he so clearly perceives stems from his lack of *existential* confidence. It is due, in other words, to the collapse in his mind of any kind of positive belief. His search in the novel is not in the first place for a social solution at all; it is for a system of beliefs and ideals that will allow him personally to arrive at a harmonious interpretation of life. He must first achieve, as an individual, a new framework of *ideas madres*.

This is why in Hurtado's conversations with Iturrioz, which form the ideological core of the novel, the subject of the discussion is not the social or national problem but the problem of life. What Hurtado is looking for is not a new social myth but a pattern of belief, something to replace "the old myths" of religion and philosophy that, as long as they went unquestioned, were "useful for life." In brief, "what he wanted to find was a guiding direction, a truth that was spiritual and practical at the same time."[9] The order of the two adjectives is not accidental; Hurtado is seeking an absolute, not a programme. The real story of the novel is not that of his conflict with society, but that of his search. When it fails, Hurtado rejects not merely society—he has already done that—but life itself: he dies by his own hand.

Another feature of the narrative technique that assumes significance in this connection is the total predominance of the central character. Hurtado's range of vision is the book's stage. None of the swarm of secondary characters is allowed the slightest autonomy; they exist exclusively in relation to him. In this curious imbalance we perceive a final confirmation of Baroja's artificial separation of the individual problem from the collective one and his deliberate subordination of the latter. But this must not be allowed to diminish the ultimate importance of Hurtado's quest and the complete spiritual disorientation in which it ends. Here Hurtado is kin to the other major fictional heroes of the Generation of 1898: Pío Cid in Ganivet's *Los trabajos del infatigable creador Pío Cid* (1898; The Labours of the Indefatigable Creator Pío Cid); Azorín in Azorín's *La voluntad*; Augusto Pérez in Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914; Mist) and, as we shall see, his San Manuel Bueno; and Alberto de Guzmán in Pérez de Ayala's early novel cycle. He also joins hands with those of innumerable European and American novelists and dramatists who have explored the *Angst* of our time.

III

Like Baroja, Unamuno ultimately came to see the problem of society as one of maintaining or restoring the values whose loss proved so fatal to Hurtado. For Unamuno these were specifically religious values. One of Iturrioz's remarks in *El árbol de la ciencia* forms an apt introduction to the story of San Manuel: "In order to give people a common standard, one needs a faith—even if it is a lie that has come forth out of our own selves."[10] Here in a nutshell is the typical standpoint of 1898: the assertion of the need to recover some sort of positive belief at any cost. Nineteen years after the publication of *El árbol de la ciencia*, following his triumphant return from the six-year exile to which his political activities had led him, Unamuno took up the question afresh in what is by general consent not only his finest novel, but also his spiritual and intellectual testament:

San Manuel Bueno, mártir (1930). Much has been written about it, but what has been generally overlooked (or ignored) except in passing is the social perspective of the work.

Until a decade or so ago the Unamuno who was exhaustively studied was the Unamuno *agónico*, dramatically torn between rationalism and the will to believe in the afterlife. Then in 1959 Professor Blanco Aguinaga added a new dimension to the discussion by showing how, half-concealed by his *agonismo*, there lay the Unamuno *contemplativo*, a rather different and less anguished figure.[11] What has not been sufficiently emphasized, however, is that besides these two Unamunos in enigmatic contrast there was yet a third: the Unamuno *histórico*, the public figure, the only member of the Generation of 1898, apart from Maeztu, who during the whole of his life remained involved in the politico-social struggle in Spain. Apart from his early Marxist period, this is the least studied part of his life and work.[12]

It has been noticed already that all the major figures of the Generation of 1898 began adult life with extreme left-wing allegiances. Subsequently, Baroja, after two defeats at the polls as a Republican, gave up politics, and Azorín and Maeztu veered over to the moderate Right and the extreme Right respectively. Unamuno remained on the Left. For years during the early part of this century he preached his doctrine of non-revolutionary, non-Marxist Socialism up and down the country, in large public meetings and in tiny gatherings in rural villages. In the 1913 election campaign he stumped the countryside in his local area on behalf of the socialists, calling for agrarian reform, rural investment, and lay control of education. After his dismissal from the rectorship of the university of Salamanca in 1914 he became the great martyr of the Left and one of its dominating figures. In 1917 in a letter to a friend, Unamuno wrote: "I am convinced that I exercise a greater influence on Spanish politics—in the highest sense of this last word—than the immense majority of deputies and senators."[13] In 1920 he was condemned to 16 years' imprisonment for the violence of his political articles, although the sentence was never put into effect. In 1924, after an open campaign against both the government and the monarchy, he was banished to the island of Fuerteventura, from which he went into voluntary exile in France. On his return to Spain after the fall of the dictator Primo de Rivera he was elected to the Constituent Assembly and made a Citizen of Honour of the new republic. In 1936, after a defiant speech, he was once more dismissed from his rectorship by the Franco regime and died under virtual house arrest.

Thus to assert, as critics have done,[14] that Unamuno broke definitively with progressive ideology in 1899 is to suggest a paradox in his life and character at least as curious as that uncovered by Blanco Aguinaga. On the one hand, we know Unamuno as a tireless campaigner for material amelioration, especially in the countryside, as a propagandist of innumerable speeches, and even as a local councillor. On the other hand, we are confronted, at one and the same time, by another Unamuno, increasingly hostile to material advance on the grounds that it gets in the way of *real* progress, which is exclusively spiritual. Throughout his entire maturity he was trapped between the slogan of *¡Adelante!* (Forward), to which he was committed as a public figure, and that of *¡Adentro!* (Inward), to which he gave most of his attention as a creative writer.

Now, when the dictatorship had collapsed and the promise of substantial social change seemed to be on the point of fulfilment, Unamuno recoiled. At the very moment when the forces of progress for which he had himself campaigned and sacrificed seemed to triumph, he revealed that he had lost faith in Spain's "eternal tradition" as a dynamic *Volksgeist.* In the hour of what seemed to be its defeat he swung back to the old immobilistic *casticista* (purist) position that he had attacked so savagely in 1895: "The eternal is not the future, the eternal is the past,"[15] he wrote now, and was soon penning a repentant *mea culpa* for "the years in which we used to go about this countryside preaching agrarian revolution."[16]

A deeply significant sentence in the 1930 preface to *La agonía del cristianismo* dramatically describes his mental situation during the autumn of that year, when after his return from exile and his plunge into political activity, he began to write *San Manuel Bueno, mártir:*

> I returned in order to take up again here, in the bosom of our native land, my civil or, if you like, my political campaigns. And while I have been plunging myself into them I have felt rising within me my former, or rather my eternal, religious anguish, and in the heat of my political tirades, there was that voice whispering to me which said, "And after this, what is it all for? What for?" And in order to silence this voice or whoever gives it to me, I went on perorating to the believers in progress . . . to convince myself of its excellences.

San Manuel tells the story of a rural parish priest who has lost his faith but who continues his ministry. As in *El árbol de la ciencia*, the inner core of the narrative is the spiritual anguish of the central character. But here, given Don Manuel's position, it is even more inseparable from the outward problem: the guidance he is to give to his flock. The crux is reached when we examine Unamuno's attitude, as it thus appears, to the common people, especially the peasantry, to whom Don Manuel's parishioners belong. On the basis of Unamuno's prior work, two possibilities seem open. One is that Don Manuel will associate with his teaching suggestions concerning the regeneration of Spain, then newly back in fashion as a theme. The other, more likely, is that Don Manuel will embrace Unamuno's well-known "agonistic" doctrine, according to which "fruitful uncertainty" is preferable to blind faith. But Unamuno develops the novel along neither of these lines.

The rejection of *regeneración* is not in itself particularly surprising if we ignore the moment of publication and the author's involvement with the foundation of the Second Republic. As early as 1898, Unamuno had written: "The fashion now is for this business of regeneration. . . . But the truth is that these national dramas interest me much less than those that unfold within the conscience of each individual"[17]; and in 1913 he had expressed his disgust with "that horrid regenerationist literature, most of which is falsehood."[18] What is much more sinister is the idea that the material progress of society threatens to destroy for ever the spiritual peace and simple contentment with their lot of the great mass of the people.

Two features of the narrative structure are noteworthy in this connection. One is the complete absence of society as such (i.e. social hierarchy) in Valverde, the village in which the novel is set. In spite of a significant reference in the introduction to the tragic poverty of the real Valverde (Riba de Lago in Sanabria) and to the oppression of its inhabitants by a local magnate who denies them even fish from the lake, no representative figure of the rural middle class appears in the book. We have only the villagers on the one hand and Don Manuel on the other: the people and their guiding personality. All possibility of social conflict is thus discreetly avoided. The other structural feature is the role and symbolism of Lázaro, the narrator's brother. Lázaro has returned to Valverde from America, bringing with him some of its material prosperity. Initially, as his hostility to Don Manuel and the latter's reference to his *progresismo* indicate, the newcomer represents imported liberal-progressive values, anti-clerical, anti-rural, anti-traditionalist, utterly opposed to those of Don Manuel. He stands, in a sense, for the sins of Unamuno's left-wing past. The very symbolism implicit in his name, Lazarus—who rose from the dead—and in his conversion by Don Manuel leaves in no doubt the stance finally adopted by the author toward progressive ideology. In addition Unamuno repeatedly underlines directly his opposition to those "dangerous and harmful men" who presume to direct the people's attention to "I don't know what sort of future society." The point is made most specifically in a conversation between Don Manuel and Lázaro in the middle of the book:

> The social question? Drop it, that doesn't concern us. Let them bring into being a new society, in which there are no longer any rich or poor, in which wealth is justly shared out, in which everything belongs to everybody, what then? Don't you think that out of the general well-being will arise an even stronger tedium with life?[19]

Where does this leave the people? Certainly socially inert, as their rather unconvincing indifference to Lázaro's reformist ideas indicates; but (Unamuno suggests) content and spiritually secure. Examining the matter more closely, though, we detect some odd contradictions. The novel is full of symbolism; but the central and most complex symbol is that of the lake with a sunken village beneath its waters. At one level of meaning the lake symbolizes the people of Valverde, and the sunken village, whose church bell can sometimes be heard ringing, symbolizes the religious tradition of Spain submerged in the soul of the people. It is on the shoulders of their belief, Unamuno suggests in an important metaphor, that Don Manuel will be carried into Heaven, as Moses was carried into the Promised Land by the Israelites. The faith that he has fostered and protected will make up for his unbelief.

But what a curious faith it is! Unamuno identifies it with the people's very hold on life itself ("With my truth they would not live"[20]); to encourage and sustain it is to "give life." And yet this faith is surprisingly fragile: it is a dream from which the people can be all too easily awakened. In contrast also with real faith, as the dream metaphor emphasizes, it is undynamic, a soporific (as Don Manuel says, "Let us give them opium"[21]), not an incentive. We note with a certain uneasiness that its extreme manifestation is the mindless acceptance of belief by Blasillo, the village idiot, whose name is a reference to Blaise Pascal and, by extension, to the idea in the "Pensées" (No. 233, The Wager) that the mechanical practice of religious rites will vanquish rational doubt. The fact that Blasillo and Don Manuel die together hand in hand suggests some doubt about Unamuno's confidence in the power of even this blind belief to survive except in very protective conditions.

Turning from the nature of the villagers' faith to its reality, we find a more fundamental ambivalence still. Again this is perceptible in the pattern of the narrative itself. Another basic symbol is that of the *zagala* (goatherd-girl) who, standing on the mountain that also symbolizes the faith of the people, is seen by Don Manuel as part of the "eternal present" in which the people live. Her happy song symbolizes the precious contentment, without "superfluous self-torture," enjoyed by those whose faith is instinctive. The whole structure of the novel rests on the contrast between this instinctive faith and Don Manuel's unbelief. Yet in the previous paragraph Unamuno has introduced a reference to "poor, ignorant, illiterate villagers who had scarcely ever gone outside the village"[22]—the supposedly contented group to which the girl belongs—which has quite the opposite implication. Far from exhibiting the untroubled happiness that Don Manuel desperately safeguards by identifying "to do good" (*hacer bien*) with "to deceive properly" (*engañar bien*), these villagers die of a "boredom with life" that the priest closely associates with his own anguish. He even goes on to assert that such tedium, "a thousand times worse than hunger,"[23] is more common in villages than in the city.

Does the simple faith of the villagers exist, then, or not? If the tedium is unimportant or exceptional, why is it mentioned just before reference to the *zagala*? The question is basic; but even more so is another. Earlier in his work Unamuno had repeatedly asserted that blind faith was dead faith, and proclaimed the need to stir people out of it. Now it is seen as *the* vital force of the common people, which must be protected at all costs. What, then, is its ultimate validity? We are specifically told that it is a mere illusion ("the illusion that all this has a finality"[24]), whose sole justification lies in its power to induce contentment, yet one that is not, apparently, proof against death from *tedio de vivir*.

For this fragile illusion, on the mere off-chance that it may in the end turn out to be a reality, the people are to be denied the counter-myth of material progress with its tangible if intranscendental benefits. It is hard to imagine a more reactionary conclusion. Understandably, critics have been quick to accuse Unamuno of being ready in his last years to impose on the people a mutilation that he would never have imposed on his own personality, and even of being stricken with panic by the appearance in 1930 of the revolutionary situation that he himself had done so much to bring about.[25]

IV

It is hardly surprising, given what has just been described, that in 1934 Maeztu, one of the major figures of the Generation of 1898, announced the blunt fact that literature in Spain had lost touch with society. By this time Baroja was pursuing in his novels a lonely quest for *ataraxia* based on abstention and retreat; Azorín had turned to scrutinizing Spanish literature for the keys to the nation's cultural tradition; Unamuno was lost in a confused pseudo-religious mystique as irrelevant as Maeztu's cult of *Hispanidad*. Long before, in his poem "A una España joven" (*c.* 1914; To Spanish Youth), Antonio Machado had already admitted that his generation had failed in its task, and called on younger men to take up the struggle. But now the younger writers were following Ortega into the wilderness of "de-humanization," where most of a generation of Spanish novelists—fortunately a poor one (Jarnés, Chacel, Espina, Bergamín)—vanished, leaving hardly a trace in literary history. In the opinion of its best critic, Dámaso Alonso, the Generation of 1927 grew up without political allegiances, without a sense of protest, without preoccupations other than purely aesthetic ones: "sacred horror of the all-too-human, many technical preoccupations, a great fear of impurities."[26] The divorce between the writer and society was almost complete.

Before the re-appearance after the Civil War—with Arturo Barea and above all Camilo José Cela—of literature with an obvious social involvement, only three major figures can be mentioned as relevant to our present interest: Valle-Inclán (1869–1935) in his second period, Lorca (1899–1936), and Sender (b. 1902). Ramón de Valle-Inclán's evolution was in a sense opposite to that of Unamuno. After early right-wing (Carlist) sympathies, he gradually came to support the Mexican social revolution and the Soviet Union. The second phase of his work includes the development of the *esperpento*, a merciless, destructive satire based on grotesque parody and distortion of those aspects of Spanish reality that Valle-Inclán detested. Here he attacked by means of savage and subversive caricature what he saw as the reduction of people to the status of mere objects in a mechanistic society, and the bourgeois values on which that society rests. Federico García Lorca's work also contains elements of rebellion against society, whether Spanish society (whose rigidity and taboo-mentality are personified in Bernarda Alba) and its stifling authoritarianism in the Civil Guards, or the modern urban industrial society against which Lorca protested in *Poeta en Nueva York* (published 1940). But, like Valle-Inclán, Lorca protested in the name of concepts ("Liberty" and "the natural life," represented by the gipsies of Spain and the Negroes of New York) that have very little extra-literary impact. Ramón Sender's main work lies outside the period covered here; but mention must be made of his novel *Imán* (1929; Earmarked for Hell), as marking the break in fiction with de-humanization and the beginning of a new pattern of creative writing that was to be shattered by the Civil War.

To sum up: *El árbol de la ciencia* and *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* both illustrate the failure of the Generation of 1898 to see society as a creative process. Instead of a positive reciprocal relationship between the individual and the collectivity, what they see is a conflict, in which they side with the former, and it is to his difficulties that they give priority. The two novels express with great clarity one of the legacies of 1898 to contemporary Spanish literature: the resolution of the social problem into an individual spiritual and ideological dilemma. Is it possible to suggest a direct causal connection between these? To the cultural sociologist or the sociologically orientated critic such a connection is axiomatic. For example we have only to look at Karl Mannheim's essay "On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*"[27] or the first part of Georg Lukács' *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*[28] for confirmation. It may well be that the reactions of the Generation of 1898 both to the national problem and to the enigma of existence ought to be re-examined in the light of their social and class situation. Such a re-examination has indeed recently been begun very persuasively with regard to Ganivet.[29] Much work remains to be done along these lines.

My own opinion, however, is that, deplorable as it may be from one point of view that the writers of the Generation of 1898 should have put the search for new vital absolutes before direct involvement with the problems of regenerating Spanish society, abandoning a mode of action for a mystique, the fact must not be overlooked that in doing so they were moving from the national to the universal plane. The Generation of 1898 preceded by more than a decade the general collapse of vital confidence that occurred in Europe only after World War I. There is food for reflection here on the part of those who rather too readily associate Spain's cultural backwardness with her socio-economic under-development.[30]

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CHAPTER 10

Agrarian Society and Industrialism in Scandinavian Literature

Lars Furuland*

I

The Scandinavian countries were poor countries in the 19th century. A tremendous increase in population caused poverty to continue, and even made certain groups of the population even poorer than they had been before. From the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century the population doubled. The explanation of this population explosion was given in 1833, tersely but accurately, by Bishop Esaias Tegnér, one of the greatest Swedish poets in the Romantic period of Scandinavian literature. It was due, he said, to peace, potatoes, and vaccines.

It is important to note that the increase in population culminated before the emergence of industrialism and the great emigration to America. This meant that the agricultural community had to support most of the huge increase. Even as late as 1870, just before industrialization began to develop on a significant scale, Scandinavia was predominantly agricultural. How was the growing revolution of industrialization mirrored in literature?

Many compassionate poems about "the complaint of the poor man" were published, but fiction depicting the state of society was still almost non-existent. No Dickens or Balzac arose in Scandinavia. Industrialism had long ago come to England and France, bringing with it a livelier world, a richer and more faceted urban society, and a broader bourgeois audience for literature. All these were prerequisites for the new realistic novel, which had already appeared in the larger countries of western Europe, but which had not, by the middle of the 19th century, yet come to Scandinavia. The whole society was characterized by its still surviving agrarianism.[1]

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* Assistant Professor, Department of the Sociology of Literature, Uppsala University.

Two other factors in the cultural situation of Scandinavia should be mentioned. The first was the strong influence exerted by Romanticism, and especially by the philosophy of German Romanticism, which did not favour realism in literature. Secondly, writers in Scandinavia had traditionally come from one social class, comprising the clergy, the nobility, the universities, and the upper bourgeoisie. They lacked the experience to attempt any informed description of working-class life. Only in 1842 did the Swedish parliament enact a law establishing free primary schools, but the effects (as regards literature) were not felt for several decades. It took 50 or 60 years before authors of any significance appeared from the working or peasant class.

An important role in the democratization of Parnassus during the 20th century has been played by the education-extension movement, especially free public libraries and *folkhögskolor* (folk high schools) for adult education, which were first founded in Denmark. Research[2] has shown that 75 well-known authors, elected members of the Swedish Authors' Association, had been students at folk high schools.*

The development of industrialism in Scandinavia is usually traced back to the middle of the 19th century; it is important only after 1870. Realistic literature, giving a detailed account of social conditions, made its appearance in all Scandinavian countries during the 1880s. This is referred to as "the modern breakthrough" in histories of Danish and Norwegian literature; in Sweden the period is simply called "the eighties." The authors of that time were influenced by realistic and naturalistic currents from abroad, and their attention was attracted by the new social problems that followed in the wake of industrialization.

The desire for greater social realism resulted in an expansion of the subject-matter of literature. But society itself was changing even more rapidly; different types of work and working groups were coming into existence much sooner and faster than they appeared in the pages of books. From a sociological point of view the literature of the 1880s tells us little about the new working class. Despite the conscious intention of the writers of the period to write in a realistic manner and to get to know the actual way of life of the people they described, the fact remains that they knew virtually nothing about the industrial worker, concentrating instead upon quite different groups of the poor population.

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* In 1967 some 74 members of the Swedish parliament and four members of the cabinet had received their education not in colleges, high schools, or universities, but in folk high schools.[3]

The social interests of these authors led them to depict life in the countryside. The idealized peasant type of earlier literature gave way to a more clearly "proletarian" conception and depiction of country folk. It was the writers of "the modern breakthrough" or "the eighties group," with their stories of everyday life, who made room in Scandinavian literature for farm hands and poor peasants.[4]

II

The realism of the 1880s represented an advance on earlier literature chiefly by its more penetrating psychological understanding of poverty. This tendency was to determine the direction of much 20th-century literature, and no writer was to be more influential in this respect than August Strindberg (1849–1912), particularly in his autobiographical writing, which directly foreshadows later working-class writing. Proletarian authors all over Scandinavia could feel a kinship with the man who called himself "the son of a servant." For the self-taught authors of the 20th century (the "autodidacts") Strindberg was not primarily a social critic but the author of the autobiographical novel *Tjänstekvinnans son* (1886; The Son of a Servant).[5] He was the first to fix the proletarian perspective in Swedish literature and to introduce the terminology of "upper class" and "lower class." Yet it is interesting to note that Strindberg called himself an "agrarian socialist" and rebuked the "industrial socialists" for their belief that "not the peasant, but the worker, holds the future in his hands."[6] They, in their turn, condemned his "smallholder" ideology while continuing to admire him as a great writer.

The social and political debate had traditionally been dominated by the problems of the agricultural community, and Strindberg followed that line. This was only natural in countries where agriculture gave more than three quarters of the population its livelihood as late as the end of the 19th century. The social democrats refused to follow this tradition. Socialist agitation about 1900 was directed above all at the industrial workers and other groups of workers in the cities and towns. But this political view was still largely unrepresented among the authors of the day. This is another reason why there were few good literary descriptions of workers. There were two or three important exceptions to this rule, primarily the great proletarian author from Denmark, Martin Andersen Nexø (1869–1954), who as a child lived in the slums of Copenhagen and later became a poor shepherd boy on the island of Bornholm. He experienced at first hand that confrontation between the old agrarian world and modern industrial society that provides much of the tension in Scandinavian literature from the 1880s to the 1950s.

Nexø's most interesting social work is *Pelle erobreren* (1906–10; Pelle the Conqueror),[7] a novel in four parts, which introduced the worker into Danish literature, and without exaggeration may be called the first great Scandinavian proletarian work. The poor orphan boy Pelle begins empty-handed but wins at last in the hard struggle for life. He has to struggle for all that he achieves; he does this with his own hands, as "the conqueror" of the title indicates. He is a plain man with the future before him, the symbol of the workers' movement. Nexø was very conscious that poor people also perish in the struggle for life, as he shows in the fates that befall various secondary figures in the novel. He wrote a counterpart to the novel about Pelle, *Ditte menneskebørn* (1917–21; Ditte, Daughter of Man), in which the leading character is a poor girl, and here it is Ditte herself who perishes. *Ditte* presents what is perhaps Nexø's finest description of childhood, although *Pelle* gives a better survey of society and is more interesting as a novel of social development.

Pelle grows up on a large farm on which his father is an agricultural worker. Even as a child, Pelle has to work hard and suffer much. He learns to adjust and uses flattery to protect himself from the rawness of the workers on the farm. His father is too weak to defend him. But deep down Pelle is invulnerable. He never hardens but retains his ability to feel pity for other people and to use his imagination. What Nexø wrote about Pelle may be cited as his aim in writing the novels:

> Pelle is the proletarian—that is, the human being himself—who, naked, equipped only with health and a joy in living, hires himself out to life. . . . He is both you and I, all of us who come from the depths and climb up to get our share of the new day. The proletarian used to be the meanest creature earth had, but now he is the hero of life's great novel. All the world is waiting for him. He has done everything himself—and with his bare hands. A hero as lacking in outer glory as has ever been seen.[8]

When he is half-grown, Pelle leaves the farm and becomes an apprentice shoemaker in a small town (following again the actual experiences of his author). He begins to learn a craft that is threatened by industrialization: shoe factories are stealing the market from shoemakers working by hand. The craftsmen fight a bitter battle with the advancing big business based on the machine. The craftsmen and citizens of the little town cling to their old prejudices and traditions, fearful of all the new social and political ideas of the time. Pelle experiences mostly the seamy side of the old patriarchal relationship between master and apprentice. The economic basis for a fatherly relationship between employer and worker has disappeared, and only the disadvantages of the system at last remain: the lack of freedom of the worker, and his dependence on the master.

Nexø also takes a close look at the difficulties of a boy from the country in adjusting to life in the town. His adjustment becomes even more difficult when Pelle comes to Copenhagen, already an industrial city. All at once he is in the midst of what Nexø calls the "great battle" between Labour and Capital. He now becomes a convinced socialist. He does so for quite untheoretical reasons (he knows very little about the works of Marx or other theorists), but he has personal experience of the conditions of work in Copenhagen, the need for workers to join together, and the battle of strikes and lockouts, and this is decisive.

One of the best parts of this section of the novel is the author's analysis of the conflict between the family's demands on the worker as a breadwinner and the organization's demands on him for solidarity as a member of the team. Pelle's wife is the faithful mother and the defender of the home. She does everything to protect her family but is completely blind to social questions. Pelle, on the other hand, chooses to become a leader of the workers; but he is rendered powerless by the managers who, with the help of a false accusation, put him in prison. The conflict with his family is resolved, after his time in prison, by compromise. Husband and wife have learnt to understand one another better; the wife respects the husband's interest in society, the man understands the significance of the home to society. "Society should be like a good home, filled with love—it's as simple as that."

Toward the end of the novel, Pelle gets the opportunity to realize his plan for a worker-controlled co-operative factory. Thus, the book does not end with a realistic description of conditions in Scandinavia at the turn of the century, but with a programme for a utopia. All problems seem to have been solved, and this has caused the book to be criticized as a vision of the world through rose-coloured spectacles. Nexø defended himself by saying that *Pelle* was only a prologue, a prelude to the decisive battle.

Certainly *Pelle* has been significant in setting a pattern for working-class literature, and it has been influential all over the world. The reason for this is perhaps that the novel depicts the growth—the pioneering moment—of a social process that has, to a very great extent, contributed to the moulding of the 20th century. Its ideas and proposed lines of development may be open to discussion, but Nexø's observations are based upon his knowledge of actual people, whom he depicts with great compassion.

III

Other Scandinavian working-class writers[9] have also focussed attention on people torn from their agricultural background and forced to cope with a life in new surroundings. Even an author such as Pär Lagerkvist (1891–1974) was also strongly influenced by the rural society, its traditions and outlook, as may be seen in his autobiographical sketch *Gäst hos verkligheten* (1925; Guest of Reality). And his novels about mankind's relationship to God—for such novels as *Dvärgen* (1944; The Dwarf), *Barabbas* (1950), and others he was awarded a Nobel Prize—might very well be discussed from a sociological point of view. Lagerkvist was personally tormented by the clash between the old Lutheran faith of Sweden and the modern lack of faith—the spiritual counterpart to the conflict between traditional rural society and the new industrialism.

The Norwegian novelist Johan Falkberget (1879–1967) must also be mentioned. He came from a family of farmers but worked as a miner before he became an author. His first important book, a bitter account of industrial life, was *Svarte fjælde* (1907; Black Mountains). The "mountains" are the ore dug from the mines:

> In the big mines, everything was as it had been. Those who worked and slaved up there were exchanged for new workers as they were worn out. They were trampled down in slavery in the black mountains beside the singing machines—until the last ounce of life was sucked from them.

In another novel, *Brændoffer* (1917; Sacrifice), Falkberget tells of a farm-hand who finds himself amid the industrial proletariat of the city. The man leaves the farm to free himself from the patriarchal power of his master and to become a free worker, but the pressures of the big city and of industrialism crush him. Like Gor'ky, Falkberget shows how people are moulded by the process of labour. His chief works are two cycles of historical novels about Norwegian mineworking and smelting in former times: *Christianus Sextus* (1927–35) and *Nattens brød* (1940–59; Bread of the Night).

Toward the close of the 19th century, many of the sons of farmers and agricultural labourers left the land to seek work in the new industries. A large number of them became itinerant construction workers; they built bridges, railways, and power stations, moving from place to place, and often filling in time with forestry work. This first generation of itinerant workers appears in the work of both Nexø and Falkberget; it is also central to the novels of the Norwegian Kristofer Uppdal (1878–1961)[10] and the Swede Gustav Hedenvind-Eriksson (1880–1967). Each was much preoccupied by the fragmentation of the ancient agricultural community and by the life of the construction workers in their first attempts to create a new solidarity among themselves and to form labour unions.

The novels of Falkberget, Uppdal, and Hedenvind must be seen against the background of the violent pace of industrialization in Scandinavia during the decades around the turn of the century. Large groups of country people went into construction work or the factories, torn loose from their old surroundings and at the same time susceptible to the ideas of Socialism. The workers were convinced that their wages did not increase at the same pace as the profits of the companies, in spite of the fact that business was generally good, and this led to serious disturbances in work, and to strikes and lockouts.

We can examine this first generation of working-class writers by examining the work of Hedenvind in some detail. In many ways a writer's writer, he is read and admired more by other writers and critics than by the public at large. His significance for the next generation of authors in Sweden—the generation of Eyvind Johnson and Ivar Lo-Johansson—is unquestionably very great. What has interested them in Hedenvind's work is above all his depiction of society, based on his own experience but providing a remarkably broad view of the whole process of change.[11]

Hedenvind grew up in traditional rural surroundings in northern Sweden; he left home after a conflict with his father and became a wandering and property-less worker in the service of industrialism. He became, indeed, a typical product of early Scandinavian industrialism—a worker without any permanent home or property. His only university was a folk high school, just as it had been for Nexø and Uppdal, and was to be later for Ivar Lo-Johansson and Vilhelm Moberg. His journeys took him from job to job, inside and outside Sweden, in "the great dance of hunger," as he called it. He belonged to

> a rare and generous time, when new ideas wrestled with old ones, you might say, in the churchyard, at the mill, in the workshop, on the square, and in the marketplace. When railroads were drawn through the country and timber was floated down the rivers, when simple rural

> smithies grew into workshops, workshops into factories. Newspapers were started in every town. And many young men . . . began to study on their own.[12]

The process of industrialization in Sweden drew its strength from centres of power in the north. From the middle of the 19th century onward the tremendous expansion there of forestry, electricity generation, and mining, together with the building of railways, established the basis for Sweden's rapid evolution from an agrarian country, in many ways underdeveloped, into a leading industrial nation.

In his first book in 1910, Hedenvind's emotions vacillate between a negative and a positive view of the process of industrialization. In the final chapter, the changed economic conditions bear a large part of the blame for all the misfortune that has come to the community; but his description of how the first workmen arrive in the community is imbued with a sympathy that shows a guarded acceptance of the new era: the workmen are laying "the foundation . . . for the dwelling that will lift a new era from the wilderness. . . . "[13]*

Hedenvind's *Vid Eli vågor* (1914; By the Waves of the Eli), is a kind of monument to the new era. The reservations shown in his first book, in which we see the forests being laid waste, have now given way to a sense of progress. *Vid Eli vågor* is about the construction of the early hydro-electric-power plants. A farmer in this novel represents all that is about to die; he is obliged to work in the new industry, but fails to come to terms with it. He finds it difficult to work for others, cannot adjust to the working rhythm of the construction gang, and finally dies in an accident. The fate of the farmer is depicted with compassion. Hedenvind knew from his own experience what the process of adaptation could cost. The new era demands its sacrifices, both in old customs and in people, but it must not be condemned for that. Hedenvind accepts the new world; he is even fascinated by it. The buildings of the power plant become "monuments that will stand as a reminder for all time."

Such a picture of industrial surroundings is rare in Swedish literature as early as 1914; machines were usually depicted as hateful objects. Hedenvind, however, saw life in its wonderful multiplicity of joy and sorrow, of good and evil, in this collective novel that describes a group of workers engaged in a common project. Then, in the 1920s, Hedenvind began to publish a series of novels about the epoch of the bridge builders and the railway builders in Scandinavia. This fascinated him because, like himself, it represented the stage of transition from farm work to industrialism. He told the story of how a new community grows up and how the old proletariat are sucked in by industrialism, get work and money in their pockets, and buy food from the local store. The old barter economy is swept aside. The workers achieve economic improvement, but seldom security. Hedenvind's novels of the 1920s show people's continuous struggle to fill their pockets—and the breaking away that resulted: the break with their former homes and former patterns of living. People fight their way upward or go under in "the struggle for iron," as he calls the process of industrialization. The name of one of Hedenvind's novels of this period, *Det bevingade hjulet* (1928; The Winged Wheel), captures in an image the meaning of this historical process: the wheel that turns on its axle without an animal pulling it becomes a symbol for the new era.

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* In *Snøskottning i paradiset* (1952; Shovelling Snow in Paradise) and other later novels Hedenvind returned to the subject of the beginnings of the forestry industry in a style that blends fact and fiction, history and saga.

In Hedenvind's novels, feelings of solidarity play an important part and are much discussed. One of the principal questions he raises is how the feeling of belonging together can be developed into a social consciousness. He was not following here any political theory but basing himself upon his own observations. He did not, for instance, believe in the catastrophe theory of Marxism, that the proletariat must sink to the bottom in order to revolt and take over the leadership of society. In an interview, Hedenvind expressed his ideas as follows:

> From my own experience I know that a person who has sunk to the bottom cannot take care of himself, much less run a society. I have read everything I could get my hands on about revolutions and I've seen that new masters simply replace the old ones. Human beings must follow a path of development or else perish.[14]

Hedenvind was never particularly interested in the analytical type of character that is typical of the contemporary novel. His style was to let his people live through their actions. Their reactions to the events in which they are engaged reveal their personalities; that is why he is most interested in points of change in individual lives and in history.

Eyvind Johnson (b. 1900) is also from northern Sweden, and is one of the foremost of the second generation of working-class authors. Johnson learned at an early age what it is like to do hard and dangerous work. As a boy of 14 he was taken on as a worker at a timber camp and he also worked at arduous jobs in a brickyard and a sawmill. Finally, at the age of 19, he fled from manual labour, and moved to Stockholm and from there to Berlin and Paris. His prose was often experimental, following such sources of inspiration as Proust, Gide, and James Joyce; he introduced the stream-of-consciousness monologue to the Swedish novel. During the 1930s he returned to the Norrland of his childhood and wrote his four-part masterpiece, *Romanen om Olof* (1934–7; The Story of Olof).*

Johnson learned much from Hedenvind about depicting society and workers, and he has often praised Hedenvind as a pioneer. But whereas Hedenvind's technique is still close to that of the old Icelandic sagas, to folk stories and the Bible, Johnson (while inheriting something from this old epic style of working-class novel) also brought modern techniques of writing to bear on the proletarian novel. In the *Olof* stories we meet the boy Olof in several important working-class situations in north Sweden: in the barracks of the forestry workers, the sawmill, the brickyard. The first volume presents a broad social epic of Norrland during the second decade of the 20th century. The point of view is always the boy's, as he struggles to be accepted as a member of the work team. Then we see him trying to free himself from his background: he studies, and takes part in labour unions and in the adult education movement. He leaves one job after the other, dissatisfied with his surroundings and with himself. At the end the hero is preparing to journey southward from Norrland, the land of timber and forestry. The implication is that he is about to devote himself to an intellectual and artistic profession—a line of development to be found in several novels by Scandinavian working-class authors of this period.

IV

Several modern authors have written about yet another feature of Swedish social life—the system of recruiting manpower on the large estates that was introduced at the beginning of the 19th century. The estate owners got rid of their crofters and tenant farmers and employed instead workers paid in kind (*statare*). The system was doubtless efficient, but it left the farm labourers dispossessed and dependent upon the arbitrary behaviour of the landowners and their estate managers. The system survived far into the 20th century and was not abolished until 1944–5. By then it was no longer a modern system for the recruitment of manpower for large farm units, but a relic left over from the old barter system. Most of the *statare* lived in both material and cultural poverty. Educational movements, religious societies, and political organizations encountered great difficulties in penetrating areas dominated by the large estates.[15]

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* Jan Troell's 1966 film of the novel, remarkable alike for its portrait of the boy Olof and its interpretation of Johnson's artistic vision, presents a uniquely vivid picture of working-class life and social conflict in Sweden during World War I.

Three important Swedish writers born into families who were or had been *statare* at last exposed to the Swedish people the conditions under which these workers lived: Ivar Lo-Johansson, Jan Fridegård, and Moa Martinson. They were authors of sharply distinct character, who nevertheless came to be regarded as a group, the *statarskolan*. Although they had no common programme, critical and public opinion classed them together.

Moa Martinson (1890–1964), a writer of considerable interest, was the most talented Swedish working-class author of her sex. An illegitimate child whose father deserted her mother, Moa Martinson's first memories were of the grey working-class districts of Norrköping, where her mother toiled in a factory. The family then became *statare*. At 20 Moa married a rather unstable worker to whom she bore five children in six years. Her domestic sufferings were appalling: two of her children died young by drowning, and her husband committed suicide. She struggled to maintain little more than a bare subsistence level of existence, and yet found the strength to begin writing for radical labour groups and their publications. She survived all her misfortunes somehow, to become in her 40s what has been called "misery's cheerful narrator," remaining vigorous, expansive, always impulsive and vital, writing about proletarians whose life and labours reflect the conditions both of the countryside and of the city. Moa Martinson was herself of this type, both in her origins and in her experience, up to the time when she became a novelist.

In terms of their subject-matter, most of her novels fall into one of two groups: those of an essentially autobiographical kind, or those that are freely imaginative, but realistic, reconstructions of conditions among the lower classes in times past, mostly the *statare* or women employed in factories and weaving mills. In *Mor gifter sig* (1936; Mother Gets Married) she presents her proletarian childhood with liveliness and humour, and with so many grotesque details that it reminds one of Gor'ky. In all her novels about *statare* and workers in towns, women are always the principal persons. The best of the novels dealing with the agricultural worker of former times is *Rågvakt* (1935; Rye Watch). These novels are based on direct or documentary knowledge, and record the fairy-tales and old customs of country folk. Although the construction of her novels is sometimes careless, her writing is remarkable for its spontaneity, inventiveness, and above all a warm, direct contact with life's everyday realities.

Jan Fridegård (1897–1968) had his first work published in 1931. Born in Uppland, the son of a *statare*, he worked at a great many different jobs but left them all, either involuntarily in times of unemployment, or of his own free will in protest against working conditions. He found no satisfaction in manual labour, but above all he was driven by a thirst for knowledge. When Fridegård sent one of his first manuscripts to a publisher he wrote about his school years: "I never had an opportunity of learning my own language. In a village primary school with four classes nobody cares about such trifles as our mother tongue."

Breaking away from one's original environment can be a painful experience. For Fridegård, as for many others, it took a long time and involved many unsuccessful attempts. His "universities" were many and rough. He had personal experience of the life of a *statare* and of an unemployed worker, and also of imprisonment. But he was in reach of a good public library, and he contributed to some small working-class newspapers. Later in life, Fridegård said that the things that meant most to his starved spirit were the books from this library; he had no money to buy books of his own. He writes: "I well remember the supreme feeling that seized me when I was able to choose from thousands of volumes—I who had only known a few borrowed copies of 19th-century Romanticism that occasionally circulated among the cottages of the *statare*. This was a heaven from which I had been barred until then."[16]

In 1930 Fridegård described his social situation before he became an author:

> There are and always have been young people who could do anything if only they were given some encouragement at the right moment. They do try to advance on their own, but when everything obstructs them it is not easy. Everybody smiles at their efforts, and I know more than one case of a young man who, wanting to learn, took to the woods so that people would not sneer at him for reading educational books long after he had left primary school. These intelligent young people are also very sensitive in most cases, and such treatment can keep them down forever.[17]

When Fridegård's books began to be published he took a further step in his spiritual liberation. His real ability to create characters, depict nature, and handle the language was not discernible until his second book appeared: *En natt i juli* (1933; A Night in July), a well-written novel about a strike among *statare*. Today Fridegård's reputation is founded mainly on his first three autobiographical novels about his alter ego, *Lars Hård* (1935–7).

All Swedish working-class authors have stressed how important their childhood has been to them. On the one hand, they have felt themselves to be members of the same proletarian group as their parents; on the other, they have had to break away from their original surroundings in order to become writers. The break was necessary for them to be able to see their background in true perspective. They have had to struggle to form intellectual and literary contacts, and often to win for themselves an opportunity simply to read and write. The earlier they have freed themselves, the earlier they have usually established themselves as writers. Nearly all of them have left the countryside and settled in the cities. Somewhere in their literary careers they have all returned to the subject that was most personal to them. And in quite a few cases they have managed to mould their childhood experience into a mature, artistic form.

The third *statare* author, Ivar Lo-Johansson (b. 1901), developed a special literary programme for his works about the *statare*. He wanted to depict a whole group of people, and to let the anonymous crowd become the main character of the novel. He wished to describe "the ordinary and quiet people who constituted my class." The novel *Godnatt, jord* (1933; Goodnight, Earth) is a pioneer work of the *statare* group, an immense panorama of life on a rural estate from the turn of the century to the time of World War I. It is a cry of desperation from an oppressed social class, but even so it is a book full of sunshine, and is remarkably vivid.

It was in a letter to his publisher in 1933 that Lo-Johansson first disclosed his plans: he wanted to become the spokesman of the *statare* and to investigate their conditions. The period during which Lo-Johansson concerned himself with the *statare* was to last for 12 years, from the appearance of *Godnatt, jord* in 1933 until the system was abolished in 1945. During this time he also produced a novel on a somewhat different theme —*Kungsgatan* (1935), about a country youth who comes to the city— which gives a vivid impression of proletarian life in Stockholm. But a superior work is *Bara en mor* (1939; Only a Mother), in which the main character is a *statare* woman heroically fighting for her family. And Lo-Johansson's most impressive contribution to working-class writing in these years is a great collection of short stories, *Statarna* (1936–7), which together constitute a chronicle—indeed, a historical epic—embracing the lives of a whole class of people.[18]

Many of these short stories describe what life could be like for the *statare* as late as the 1920s and 1930s. In one of them Lo-Johansson makes a personal declaration:

> Not many years ago the *statare* stepped down into the ditches by the road when the gentry drove past. My father has stood there. Many in my family have stood there. My mother, worn out to the point where she could hardly walk home, has stepped aside and curtsied for the

> gentry in their soft carriages and yellow traps. I sometimes feel surprised that I write about hills and flowers, when *they* have existed.[19]

Frightening revelations of cruelty, ignorance, and wretchedness contrast with stories about educational work in temperance societies and trades unions, about the building of meeting halls and attempts at collaboration.

The final story in the first volume of *Statarna* is called "Reinforcement": it is about the first tractor to be used on the estate. It does as much work as a dozen oxen and half a dozen men. The workers drive the oxen to the railway station and force them into the cattle truck that will deliver them to the slaughter-house. The story ends: "When the *statare* had got a bit nearer home, they heard the tractor moving over the grey earth."

The final story in the second volume sums up the conflict between the old generation of *statare* and the present-day farm workers. The oxen have disappeared. Conflicts about wages are settled. The *stat* (that is, the payment in kind) grows less and less important. The workers themselves change, but there are still old workers who distrust the tractors and feel ill at ease in cowsheds that look like a pharmacy. There are men who would rather move than join a trade union. There are wanderers who cannot understand that the union forbids them to move "when one suddenly feels like it" and "if necessary pick a quarrel and then leave." The old *statare* asks his son what sort of freedom there really is in the new system. He gets an answer that his son feels is adequate but that the old man will never learn to understand. The son says that the old freedom was only "a freedom to toil."

In the last line of his great panorama of the *statare*, Lo-Johansson answers the critical question of what the outcome of all the changes will be. His answer is: "the agricultural worker of the modern age." There is optimism and pride in these words, just as there is in his whole account of how the *statare* became agricultural workers.

Ivar Lo-Johansson has discussed which masters of the short story he feels indebted to; above all, he mentions Maupassant, Chekhov, and Tolstoy. He writes: "The importance of these authors has indeed been so great that one can take almost any modern, ambitious Swedish short story—after 1900, sometimes even earlier—and determine from which of the three the author has learnt the art of short-story writing."[20] Tolstoy is the author Lo-Johansson praises most warmly: he calls him "the modern creator of the moral short story." The style of the modern Anglo-Saxon novelists and short-story writers has probably also influenced Lo-Johansson and counteracted his tendency to become too emotional.

Statarna describes the progress of a group of workers over a period of

150 years. We are left in no doubt that the revolutionary changes in the employment system on the estates are all for the better. At the same time we are made to see that change, even when it is for the good, may bring sadness, even tragedy, in its train. The central character in the last story is an old *statare*, who is physically and emotionally scarred by years of hardship and oppression, but who is too rooted in the old, exploitative pattern of life on the estate to accept, let alone welcome, change. However degrading and severe a way of life may be, its final disappearance always means tragedy to those who are too old to adapt themselves to the new.

V

Far into the 19th century, as we have seen, Scandinavia was plagued by over-population, the lack of arable land for property-less people, and extensive poverty among large groups of people. Emigration to North America was for many European countries one of the solutions to the problems of over-population and the rise of the proletariat. With the new means of transport developed by the industrial age, emigration could become a mass movement from the over-populated agrarian countries of Europe to the New World. Most emigrants were freighted in new steamships across the Atlantic and then transported further by paddle-steamer or railway out toward the great areas of the American West that had not yet come under cultivation.

Emigration from the underdeveloped countries of Scandinavia would appear to be an obvious and rewarding subject for a writer of epics. Dramatic historical events could be combined with a multitude of remarkable and moving individual stories. But this material seems to have been, for a long time, altogether too large and too difficult, and no author dared to take it up seriously. An enormous debate on the question of emigration was held around the turn of the century in the daily newspapers, in pamphlets, and in parliament. National associations against emigration were founded in Sweden, and the authorities appropriated money for a so-called emigration investigation—probably the largest official investigation ever undertaken in the country. But creative writers chose other subjects. One major epic writer, Selma Lagerlöf, wrote about emigration, to be sure, but her farmers went to *Jerusalem* (1901–2), not to Minnesota.

It was not until the 1920s that the first significant novels about emigration were written—by the Norwegians Ole Rölvaag (1876–1931) and Johan Bojer (1872–1959). But the first indisputably major work about Swedish emigrants to the United States appeared only after World

War II—Vilhelm Moberg's cycle of four novels: *Utvandrarna* (1949; The Emigrants), *Invandrarna* (1952; Unto a Good Land), *Nybyggarna* (1956; The Settlers), and *Sista brevet till Sverige* (1959; Last Letter Home). His great autobiographical novel *Soldat med brutet gevär* (1944; shortened English translation entitled *When I was a Child*, 1956) gives the background to his writing career and tells of his search for intellectual improvement.[21]

Poverty, crop failures, and undue interference on the part of the authorities and the clergy contribute, in Moberg's works, to the farmers' decision to emigrate to America. Moberg (1898–1973) fleshes out his epic of emigration with an impressive array of factual detail, most of it highly credible, though not all of it necessarily typical. Primarily, however, the work is inspired by his own vision of freedom.

A historian attempting to describe the history of emigration—or indeed, the historian of the *statare* system—should try to follow the middle way, and to describe the most typical things. The poet, the novelist, the portrayer of human beings, must often diverge from the middle way. He must at times devote more interest to the remarkable, and even to the curious, than to the typical. He must operate within the limits of historical plausibility, but within this framework he may move rather freely, and his foremost duty is to be true to his artistic vision.

The theme of freedom is central to all Moberg's writings, not least those depicting the emigrants. His hero is Karl Oskar, a farmer who leaves his impoverished farm. An important part of Oskar's motivation is his reaction against pressures from his environment and from the authorities, and his love of freedom. In Oskar, Moberg created the happiest of the many seekers after freedom in his novels, for in him the longing to get away could be harmoniously combined with a longing for the earth. The characters in Moberg's earlier books are less happy in their search for freedom, which they can no longer find in the Swedish farm lands. They flee to the city from the poor, spiritually isolated villages. But they always maintain a longing for the places where they grew up, an unrequited love of the land; they have difficulty in finding the freedom they are looking for in their new urban surroundings. The hero of the emigrant books, however, can combine his demands for freedom with his inclination to be a pioneer, to seek new land, clear it, and build a new home for himself and his family.

VI

In conclusion, let us have a look at examples and themes of other recent working-class novels. In the Swedish writer Lars Ahlin's first novel, *Tåbb* *med manifestet* (1943; Tobb and the Manifesto), the principal character is an unemployed worker trying to find a job. But the real subject of the novel is a critical examination of Marxist theories, an examination that has subsequently been most important for literary and cultural discussion in Sweden. Ahlin (b. 1915) tries to scrutinize the relations between Marxism and the "small" people, those who are handicapped by their mental and physical constitution or who have great difficulties in adapting to industrial and social life. *Tåbb med manifestet* is a protest against the conception and role of a revolutionary elite in Marxist theory and socialist practice.

In several of his novels, which are mostly expansive tableaux of working-class life, Ahlin stresses the social and human stature of the ordinary worker. These novels have been very influential in Scandinavian literature and they repay close sociological and ideological analysis. They allow us to see how proletarian problems have changed and become more complex since the time of Hedenvind (whom Ahlin regards as one of his forerunners).

The life of the industrial worker in Sweden has been the principal subject for Folke Fridell (b. 1904), who began publishing in the 1940s, and for Kurt Salomonson (b. 1929), who made his *début* in the following decade. Fridell has been and still is a syndicalist. He worked as a textile worker for 29 years before becoming an author, and as a worker he belonged to a labour union with a syndicalist majority. One similarity between Vilhelm Moberg and Fridell is the significance that the concepts of freedom and flight have for both authors. Fridell's customary theme is the fate of the man who flees from the automated world of industry. This revolt often fails in Fridell's novels: the road to freedom is a circular one, leading back to the dreariness of the factory. Underlying the freedom theme, of course, is concern for the value of the individual in society—especially a society served by machines, as in *Död mans hand* (1946; Dead Man's Hand). All social care is degrading if the human being who receives the benefits of a centrally directed welfare system is made to feel like a mere cog in a vast machine. Individuals must have the opportunity to examine and influence what goes on at their places of work, in their unions, and in the community. The basis for Fridell's ideas lies in Syndicalism and in the Co-operative movement: as far as possible, the right to make decisions must be left to the small, local group. Thus Fridell often attacks the tendency toward centralization in modern Socialism. His ideals are reminiscent of the life-forms of the old Swedish village communities and farmers' collectives, but with the addition of the gospel of solidarity as preached by the workers' movement.

When Fridell's work first appeared in the 1940s he was hailed as the "renewer of working-class literature," because he devoted his attention to the situation of industrial workers in the era of the assembly line. Critics have also bestowed this honorary title of "renewer" on Kurt Salomonson, who made his *début* in 1955. Like Fridell, Salomonson is an opponent of the monolithic Swedish trades union movement, which has not been slow in answering him. An important and interesting debate about the opportunities for the individual worker to make his voice heard in the ideal industrial organization has followed in the wake of Salomonson's working-class novels.

Salomonson began his career as a journalist on a syndicalist newspaper, and much of his criticism of society is similar to that made by Fridell. Workers' organizations are attacked because they have become mere bureaucratic machines and have lost sight of their original aims.

Salomonson, in particular, directs his attacks against the workers themselves, especially the younger generation. He attacks their political apathy, their unwillingness to take responsibility, their indifference to important questions at their place of work and in society, their lack of understanding of individualists in the work group. On Salomonson's work sites there are often only two kinds of workers: the pushers climbing up the ladder of the labour union, and the spiritually lazy materialists. interested only in food, liquor, cars, and their leisure time.

Of course Salomonson exaggerates, as his critics have often complained. He does so consciously, however, in the conviction that the workers' movement too often betrays the old ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood, and has succumbed to materialism. In artistic technique, neither Fridell nor Salomonson is in any sense a pioneer—on the contrary, they are both traditionalists. But as contributions to social debate and as descriptions of society their books have been of great interest.

One of the foremost writers in Scandinavia today, the Swedish novelist and dramatist Sara Lidman (b. 1923), belongs to the tradition of working-class literature by virtue of her early novels about Norrland and by her book of social reportage, *Grüva* (1968; Mine). In her first novel, *Tjärdalen* (1953; The Tar-kiln), she exhibited a tendency important in modern Swedish writing, namely, a conscious attempt to achieve universality in portraying human beings and their problems. For Sara Lidman, a novel should focus on a conflict of great generality. In *Tjärdalen* a crime in a little village leads to many individuals being forced to face questions of personal responsibility and collective guilt, questions of sin and mercy.

Sara Lidman, like many other regional novelists of the 1950s and

1960s—for example, the Swede Per Olof Sundman (b. 1922)—has written about people in remote villages in the countryside, whose problems in the long run are those of people everywhere here and now. These authors take the little country group, which they have often learnt to know during childhood, and take their inspiration from it, making it function as a model for larger and more complicated groups. (It should, however, be noted that Sara Lidman has also gone outside the province of her childhood; extensive travels in the 1960s in Africa and the Far East, including Vietnam, have yielded novels and reportage dealing with racial oppression and colonialism.)

This outline has covered more than half a century of Scandinavian working-class prose, using mainly Swedish examples. We have seen how the confrontation between the forms of life of the old agrarian society and those of emergent industrialism has been the great subject of the social novel in Scandinavia. Today this period is over. Most novelists take a centralized and automated industrial society for granted; and they can no longer ignore global questions when they want to illustrate human conditions in this already internationalized world.

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CHAPTER 11

Politics and the Novel in Mussolini's Italy

Brian Moloney*

I

Literary debates in post-war Italy were characterized by the need to come to terms with and to evaluate the literature of the fascist period.[1] Like most debates of their kind they were inconclusive: the participants were too dogmatic, too doctrinaire; and in any case it was too early to establish, let alone see the significance of, what had actually been happening in Italy in the period from 1922 to 1943. Now, more than a quarter of a century later, the dust has begun to settle, and the vistas can be seen in some sort of perspective, less distorted by partisan passions. It is as clear now as it was in 1943 that although Mussolini's Italy had never become a monolithically totalitarian state imposing on its subjects a rigorous cultural uniformity, it did nevertheless attempt to do so, although never to the same extent as Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia. What one can perhaps do now, if we are to understand the fiction of the period, is gauge the extent to which this policy was carried out and its effect on novel-writing, particularly with regard to novels dealing with political or social themes.

It has recently been suggested that it was for only a limited period—from about 1925 until 1932—that Fascism "consciously attempted to create an organic state, in which all political, social, economic, and cultural forces would be subordinated to the state, the expression and symbol of the nation."[2] In view of this statement it is worth considering a number of points.

In the first place, it is hopeless to look for consistency in Fascism, either in theory or in practice. As far as theory is concerned, there was never any coherent body of fascist political doctrine, which in turn meant that there

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* Professor of Italian, University of Hull.

was never anything that could even in the vaguest sense of the term be described as a "fascist aesthetic" (although the extent to which some literary theories, such as those of Bontempelli, were essentially the products of a fascist society and were tinged with fascist doctrines is a subject that still remains to be explored). The most one can say at the moment is that Mussolini wished all cultural activities to project an image of an Italy that was virile and healthy; and so, just as the newspapers were not allowed to report suicides and could devote only a very limited space to the reporting of crime, the national literature was expected to display only those attributes of which the fascists approved. Critics and scholars were called upon to demonstrate that robust moral health and heroism characterized the Italian literary tradition. Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) was thus praised for the "heroic morality" that made him "the highest and worthiest spiritual guide for Italians" because he revealed what the individual could make of his life, not through the exercise of a Catholic quietism but through the exercise of the will. This interpretation by Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), the more or less official philosopher of the fascist movement, was echoed by many other critics of the period. Gentile similarly saw Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) as the poet of love—but of what love! Love "for nature, for life, for woman, for beauty, for magnanimous strength, for generous daring, for virtue, and for the fatherland," the objects of his devotion being presumably listed in ascending order of importance.[3] As far as living authors were concerned, their responsibility was to continue this official version of the national tradition. The issue was spelt out by Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of Education from 1936 to 1943, in his inaugural speech at the Venice Biennale in June 1938 (which makes it clear that attempts to impose cultural uniformity went on after 1932, the date indicated by S. J. Woolf[4]; although by 1938 there was such a discrepancy between ambition and achievement as constituted, for the more perceptive, an open invitation to satire). Bottai was admittedly speaking primarily of the visual arts, but he expressed himself in such general terms that his message was equally applicable to literature:

> For the fascist state the artist is above all a worker. The state wishes the artist to enjoy all the rights and to fulfil all the duties of a citizen; it wishes his work to be serious, useful, understood, and rewarded; and if it rejects, as useless, exasperated individualism, sterile separations, turbid indifference [*torbide indifferenze*], after having conferred on the artist a new social dignity, it demands from the artist a firm and precise awareness of the new responsibilities incumbent upon him.[5]

It is worth saying at this point that here one needs to tread carefully, because not all that *seems* to reflect a fascist attitude *does* so in reality. Alfredo Galletti is a case in point. His *Studi di letteratura inglese* (1928) praises Kipling's depiction of England's colonial pioneers, "rich with strong humanity and aggressive instincts," while at the same time denigrating contemporary England as "a power of yesterday." Again, in his *Novecento* (1935; The Twentieth Century), in the Vallardi series *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, he praises Giovanni Comisso for his "epic feeling for the free and heroic life," and condemns in many other novelists, and especially in Moravia, the qualities of which Bottai and the fascists also disapproved. All this seems to accord with the Fascist Party line. But in 1925 Galletti had signed Benedetto Croce's anti-fascist manifesto, and in 1943 his critical attitude to the regime led to his arrest. What one has constantly to bear in mind, therefore, is the somewhat anachronistic continuation in Italy of what Heinz Gollwitzer terms "Imperialism in literature and art," which is far from being peculiar to Fascism.[6] The disciples of Croce were also influential in literary circles, calling for yet another type of literature: poetic, lyrical, and intuitive by nature. The result was that there were a number of pressures, emanating from radically different sources, all of which tended to direct the novelist away from a literature treating in depth the fundamental problems of the society in which he lived.

The call for a virile national literature inevitably found an answer, although not a very impressive one as far as the novel was concerned. Alfredo Oriani (1852–1909), not particularly admired during his lifetime, had the posthumous honour of a 30-volume *Opera omnia* edition (1923–33) edited (nominally at least) by Benito Mussolini, largely because Oriani was considered to be a precursor of Fascism, and presumably also to indicate the standards to which good fascists must aspire. He was also the subject of several biographies and critical studies.[7] Arturo Marpicati, whose *Liriche di guerra* (1918; War Poems) enjoyed an inflated reputation, was also noted for his *Ritratti e racconti di guerra* (1932; Images and Tales of War). Guido Milanesi, who rose to the rank of admiral, produced until 1935 popular tales of naval exploits. All this was acceptable to the fascists, but perhaps was little more than an emanation of the contemporary support for imperialist policies. (The Abyssinian War was not a great issue of conscience, except in left-wing circles.) And the continuing popularity of Edmondo De Amicis—as the author not only of the children's book *Cuore* (1886; Courage) but also of *La vita militare* (1868; Military Life)—suggests that this kind of unsophisticated, idealized patriotism was what a large section of the Italian public wished to read. Indeed, gauging the attitude of the reading public was a difficult and delicate task. Fascism, after all, had not been imposed by force on a reluctant Italy; Mussolini had been voted into power, albeit by a rigged vote, and his popularity increased rather than decreased as time went on. This meant that whereas the regional novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries could be reasonably sure of arousing interest and compassion when they described poverty and what they and their readers would consider to be archaic social structures in the rural south, their successors could not be sure what their public's reactions would be when they attempted to diagnose what appeared to them to be the ills of the urban society of northern and central Italy in which most of their readers lived. Indeed, the desire to shock a mainly urban, middle-class public is probably an important element in several of the novels that we shall be considering. Not for nothing is Alberto Moravia's *Gli indifferenti* set in Rome and Carlo Emilio Gadda's *La cognizione del dolore*, by implication, in Brianza (a region to the south of Lake Como).

Then there was the problem of censorship. Newspapers at least knew where they stood, in that their main articles were virtually dictated by the government's press office in the Ministry of Popular Culture. Not so the man of letters, who had merely an indication in the most general terms possible of what was expected of him. It is possible that the censors themselves were not much better off, for their decisions were shot through with the same kind of inconsistency that characterized almost all aspects of government at the time. It is uncertain whether the censors knew what was expected of them or what they were to do with literature that did not conform to the required pattern. Forbid its publication? That was a possible course of action, but one that does not seem to have been taken very frequently; few novels, if any, of the post-war period are prefaced with the statement that they were written, but were not allowed to appear, during the fascist period. The censors were more likely to allow publication in a modified form, as with Elio Vittorini's *Il garofano rosso* (1933–4; The Red Carnation), or Corrado Alvaro's *L'uomo è forte* (1938; Man is Strong). From the point of view of the publisher the most alarming possibility was that one censor might allow publication and another official then either forbid newspapers and journals to review the work in question, as happened with Moravia's *Le ambizioni sbagliate* (1935; The Wheel of Fortune), or indeed confiscate the entire edition, as with Vittorini's anthology of American literature, *Americana* (1941), leaving the publisher in both cases to shoulder the cost of printing and distribution with little or no prospect of recouping his losses from sales. Small wonder that publishers such as Mondadori became cautious, and it is greatly to the credit of publishers such as Laterza of Bari, Parenti of Florence, and Bompiani of Milan that they were prepared to take risks with authors whose views were known to be unorthodox, especially after about 1936 when, although the machinery of censorship was still operative, it was becoming increasingly clear that Mussolini was losing touch with reality and that there was an unbridgeable gulf between his ambitions and his achievements. Even so, novels likely to cause trouble were sometimes printed in short runs of a few hundred copies, which both insured the publisher against making a heavy loss and also ensured only a limited distribution and limited impact, because little modern fiction was finding its way into public libraries. A publisher's self-imposed censorship was probably more effective—and more consistent—than that imposed by the government. It could hardly have been less consistent, for although it was possible for a number of authors to publish novels and historical works that implicitly offered an unfavourable critique of contemporary society, as late as 1939 the Italian translation of H. A. L. Fisher's *History of Europe* was confiscated merely because it had been produced under the aegis of Benedetto Croce.

In this bewildering situation, what could be done by the novelist who wished to deal with themes of which the regime might disapprove? (I leave on one side the intractable question of how far in any case he could be certain in advance of the government's attitude to his subject: Vittorini, who was then still a fascist, seems to have been genuinely surprised that his analysis of the appeal of Fascism to a discontented teenager should have attracted adverse criticism and been censored.[8]) One novelist at least imposed upon himself a vow of silence until there should come times in which he felt free to speak clearly and openly. By 1937 Leonida Répaci had published the first three volumes of his *Storia dei Rupe*, in which he had narrated the story of the Rupe brothers up to the beginning of World War I. It would be impossible, he felt, to continue his sequence in the political climate then prevailing, which was determined by the current "nazification" of the state:

> Having taken my story from the beginning of the 20th century to the first symptoms of Intervention (i.e. in World War I), at which point it would no longer have been possible to ignore or avoid the presence of Mussolini among the forces affecting the choice which, after the denunciation of the Triple Alliance, was to carry our country into the first world war, I was faced with this tragic alternative (it was then 1937): I could either present the "official" version of the Intervention,

> Mussolini, the War, and Fascism, or else I could wait until there should come better times in which to continue my History with that freedom of judgment necessary to a writer who does not want to be diverted from the facts on which he is hanging his story-line and on which he is basing the validity, the psychological and moral independence, of his characters.[9]

This counsel of prudence was probably inevitable in Répaci's case, given his commitment to a Marxist interpretation of his subject-matter and the stage that his novel-sequence had reached, because the Marxists were after all the main target for repression at that time; but others found it possible to exercise prudence and yet still comment effectively on the society in which they lived.

II

In Fascism's early years, when propaganda was at its height and active repression most virulent, and to some extent in the 1930s too, when general support for Mussolini was at its strongest, the most eloquent gesture of non-conformity open to novelists was a simple refusal to satisfy the demands of the party, a refusal to project a propagandist image of a heroic Italy that had not in fact come into being, and to describe instead a society that they saw as vicious and corrupt. It was certainly this refusal on the part of certain writers to formulate a "positive" message that gave most offence in official circles at the time. Eugenio Montale's poem "Non chiederci la parola," published in *Ossi di seppia* (Cuttlefish Bones) in 1929, is often quoted as crystallizing the mood of a whole generation of non-conformist writers, especially in the way in which it ironizes at the expense of the self-confident man who knows where he is going but is unaware of the darker consequences of his actions.

> Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato
> l'animo nostro informe, e a lettere di fuoco
> lo dichiari e risplenda come un croco
> perduto in mezzo a un polveroso prato.
>
> Ah l'uomo che se ne va sicuro,
> agli altri ed a se stesso amico,
> e l'ombra sua non cura che la canicola
> stampa sopra uno scalcinato muro!
>
> Non domandarci la formula che mondi possa aprirti,
> si qualche storta sillaba e secca come un ramo.
> Codesto solo oggi possiamo dirti,
> ciò che *non* siamo, ciò che *non* vogliamo.

(Do not ask us for the word that squares off, every side,
our shapeless life-urge, and in characters of fire
proclaims it and shines out like a crocus
lost half-way down a dusty field.

Ah the man who goes by with confidence,
a friend to others and to himself,
and never gives a thought to that shadow of his
the dog-days brand upon a flaking wall!

Do not ask us for the formula to open worlds,
some twisted syllable, yes, one dead-dry as a branch.
Nowadays we can tell you only this,
what we are *not*, what we do *not* want.)[10]

The un-heroic hero is not of course a peculiarly Italian phenomenon; nor are his appearances in the Italian novel limited to the fascist period, for he makes his first significant appearances in Italian literature in Italo Svevo's *Una vita* (1892; A Life) and *Senilità* (1898; As a Man Grows Older). But there can be no doubt that in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s the recurrence of the uncertain, vacillating, doubting man, unable to establish personal relationships, and equally unable to believe in causes of any kind, takes on an additional political significance.

Giuseppe Antonio Borgese's *Rubè* (1921), Moravia's *Gli indifferenti* (1929; The Time of Indifference), and Francesco Jovine's *Un uomo provvisorio* (1934; A Provisional Man) all present central characters of this kind. Moravia's is the most celebrated of these novels, and at the time it was the most resented in official circles—not because it was a specifically anti-fascist novel (Moravia had little or no interest in politics at the time) but because it was fiercely critical of a society that also happened to be fascist, and the regime wished to see that society presented in a more favourable light. It is also the most pessimistic, for Moravia holds out to Michele and Carla no hope of escape from the impasse in which they find themselves. Both try to rebel against the values and conventions of a society from which they feel totally estranged: Michele through participation and action, which he hopes will restore him to an Eden of authenticity, and Carla through love (of a kind). Both are defeated. Michele is too introspective ever to act with spontaneity of feeling, and after the failure of his attempt to play the part of the outraged brother avenging his sister's dishonour, he finishes by taking the advice offered to him earlier by the cynical, materialistic Leo and goes off to make an appointment with Lisa, who will no doubt become his mistress. Carla is to marry Leo but the structure of the novel and the language of key sections dealing with her make it clear that her "new life" will not be that of a *donna angelicata* in the *stilnovo* tradition but will resemble that of Lisa, who vainly seeks her lost youth and purity in the arms of a younger lover.

Both Borgese and Jovine, on the other hand, strike a more optimistic note and admit the possibility of remedial action, possibly the result of the current Crocean interpretation of Fascism as a disease alien to and only temporarily affecting a basically healthy body politic. *Rubè* depicts a divided society, and the ignoble accidental death of Rubè himself, in a political demonstration that develops into a clash between fascists and communists, is heavily symbolic of the consequences of civil strife. But although Rubè achieves nothing and dies a pointless death, his friend Federico Monti, who in some ways has suffered more than Rubè himself, wins through to some kind of salvation and begins to practise his profession as a doctor. Similarly, in *Un uomo provvisorio*, Giulio Sabò becomes a doctor. His chronic introspection and his life in Rome reduce him almost to suicide, from which he is saved by a return to his native province and a rediscovery of his roots, by love, and by the resumed practice of his profession, forced on him in an emergency—all of which bring him an involvement in life that he has not known before.

Moravia's novel has an inner coherence and an incisive quality that are lacking in Borgese and Jovine. He selects a limited target for his attack—one section of Roman middle-class society; his cinematographic technique is designed to focus attention principally on two characters within that group; and the action is so circumscribed in terms of time and place as to achieve an almost claustrophobic sense of restriction on the characters involved, so that the failure of the attempts of Michele and Carla to break the mould into which they are being forced seems inevitable. Moravia's style, too, is stripped of rhetorical elements, whereas both Borgese and Jovine retain a residue of D'Annunzian preciosity. There is also a certain thematic, as well as a linguistic, diffuseness about Borgese's novel, and in *Un uomo provvisorio* there is an element of gratuitousness in Sabò's redemption, in that it is not satisfactorily related to his psychological problems as described in the earlier part of the novel. Borgese in 1921 can hardly be faulted for advocating that the divisions in Italian society should be healed, because it was not then too late for the generation tempered by the 1914–18 war to take remedial action. The anti-fascist Jovine, on the other hand, could offer no reasonable grounds for optimism in 1934: by that date Fascism looked as if it had come to stay. To a fascist sympathizer the situation must have looked fairly satisfactory: the government could point to some positive achievements, the years of violence were receding into the distance, and the tragic consequences of Mussolini's African policy had not yet become apparent. But Jovine's intention was not to present such a favourable interpretation, with the result that—whether he intended it or not—his denouement implies that with a bit of luck the individual can seek out his own private salvation and satisfactions, whatever the state of society.

Yet here is one of the basic problems confronting the individual in fascist society. Within certain limits life did appear to go on much as, or indeed more smoothly than, it always had done, and in certain fields it was possible to do good work. The demands of the fascist state were never as obtrusive as those of the Stalinist or Maoist state; there was no need to relate one's every achievement to a fascist equivalent of Marxism or Maoism. It is perhaps for this reason that much indirect comment in the fiction of this period lacks a cutting edge—a cutting edge used to great effect, on the other hand, by Croce in his historical works, and particularly in the celebrated third chapter of his *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (1929), entitled "La vita politica e morale (1871–1887)." In this chapter Croce eloquently describes the sense of liberation experienced in the newly united kingdom of Italy, in which Rome had become the centre of free and open parliamentary debate and in which people no longer glanced fearfully at the palace of a despotic ruler on whose whims their destinies depended. The parallel between the pre-Risorgimento period as described (and to some extent polemically misrepresented) by Croce and the myth of an omnipotent and omniscient Mussolini watching over the destiny of Italy from his study in Palazzo Chigi—a pale foreshadowing of the later Stalin myth—is striking. Few Italians would have wished to deny the validity of Croce's comments on Italy before 1861; equally, few could have failed to recognize the force, although by no means all would have accepted the validity, of his strictures on the way in which Mussolini had reduced parliament to the status of a puppet-show, of his repudiation of the myth of *Italietta*, and of his refutation of Mussolini's claim to represent the continuation, and indeed the climax, of a historical process.

Jovine attempts something analogous in *Signora Ava*, written between 1938 and 1941 and published in 1942. The emphasis here is not on the positive achievements of the Risorgimento, as was the case with Croce; Jovine's purpose is different. The novelist seems at first sight to have written no more than another in the series of Italian novels that expose the less glorious side of the Risorgimento, a series that includes Federico De Roberto's *I vicerè* (1894; The Viceroys) and Luigi Pirandello's *I vecchi e i giovani* (1923; The Old and the Young). Jovine describes the Risorgimento as a movement that, although some of its adherents were inspired by nobility of mind, nevertheless contained much rhetoric and attitudinizing and was easily diverted from its ostensible purpose of social renewal by pressure groups interested only in the retention of their own power and the preservation of the *status quo*. He draws a striking parallel with the contemporary scene and the so-called "revolution" of the fascists. Of particular interest in this respect is Jovine's analysis of the appeal of the movement for unification to the students at Don Giovannino's academy, youthfully idealistic, discontented with their prospects, vaguely dreaming of a new Italy and a better life, and perhaps lured by the fascination of violence. These figures occur again, more sharply individualized, in Jovine's later novel *Le terre del Sacramento* (1950; The Estate in Abruzzi). And *Signora Ava*, unlike the earlier *Un uomo provvisorio*, offers its hero Pietro Veleno no possibility of escape or of opting out of the struggle in which he has become involved in spite of himself; Pietro is arrested just as he and Antonietta are about to cross the border into the Papal States, which he naively expects to be an earthly paradise with pardon for all repentant sinners.

Signora Ava brought Jovine fame, mainly because it was presented by the critics as an essentially lyrical work, reproducing the quality of *coralità* that Russo thought to be the outstanding characteristic of Giovanni Verga's *I Malavoglia* (1881; The House by the Medlar Tree). This seems to be a misinterpretation: the novel is characterized not so much by lyricism as by a certain diffuseness that fatally dulls its impact, a diffuseness that is only partly the result of a weak story-line and an imbalance of tone and structure. The problem is that Jovine seems to want to condemn (anachronistically, if he is referring only to the 19th century) social structures that he considers to be based on exploitation, and at the same time to idealize as a kind of *vert paradis*, from which we moderns are excluded, certain ways of life that are a consequence of those same social structures. A similar criticism can be made of Alvaro's *Vent' anni* (1930; Twenty Years) and *L'uomo è forte*.

It would seem natural to regard the latter novel, for example, as basically an attempt to describe the evils of life in Soviet Russia, for not only is it the most "Russian" of all Alvaro's novels, in the sense that it attempts to recreate in a contemporary setting Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, but it is also set in a country ruled by a totalitarian government that has won its way to power through revolution and a bloody civil war, and in which the secret police hunt down those enemies of the state who maintain contacts with hostile foreign powers and who practise all manner of subversion and counter-revolution. At the request of the censor it was published with a prefatory note explaining that the action takes place in Russia. But as Alvaro's preface to post-war editions of the novel makes clear—and his contention is supported by a comparison of the novel with his diaries and notebooks—its theme is not as specific as that, in spite of the prefatory declaration, which helped to bolster up the fascist bogy of the "Bolshevik menace." The novel can be read, as Alvaro intended it should be, as a study of the corrosive influence on human relationships of fear and suspicion in any totalitarian society that seeks to impose cultural uniformity on its members—or at least it could be so read were it not for Alvaro's preoccupation on the moral plane with the theme of guilt and expiation, which makes the Inquisitor a necessary, and even a sympathetic, figure. And if Alvaro's attitude to totalitarianism is thereby rendered ambiguous, his attitude to the Western democracies is no less so, for in so far as the engineer Dale decries them as purposeless, and their cultures as sterile and frivolous, he is reinforcing the fascist image of a "decadent" Europe, even though, in spite of himself, he is forced to admit that they contain in their decay possibilities of new growth:

> A world was going to the dogs, that was his thesis. But then, with detail after detail, he described that world as anything but declining, discovering within himself a remnant of pride at the thought that he had lived there, re-discovering in ancient laws and outworn customs, decadent, the seed of something that was alive in spite of the times and the years, ready to blossom again.

Nor can one say in defence of *L'uomo è forte* that Alvaro, as so often in his work, is simply pointing out the way in which modern urban life has sheltered the city-dweller from the struggle for survival to which peasants are exposed, thus weakening him. This is true of *Vent' anni*, but not of the later novel.

Vent' anni in fact is notable chiefly as one of the first of a series of satirical novels, and the question that inevitably springs to mind is why oblique comment had so little success in the novel in general when satire flourished. The artistic deficiencies of novels such as *L'uomo è forte* and *Signora Ava*—their weak story-line, blurred focus, and imbalances of tone and structure—seem to be symptomatic either of a fatal ambiguity of attitude or of the inadequacy of the method to depict a situation in which what Croce was subsequently to call "the incorrigibly clown-like appearance" of Fascism was becoming more and more apparent. There was nothing in Fascism that corresponded to Alvaro's Inquisitor; it could be said of the mysterious country of R in which the action is set, as was later said of Silone's novels, that "Fascism wasn't like that."

The same could hardly be said of *Vent' anni*, in which Alvaro vigorously debunks the fascist myth of a martial Italy. Jingoistic patriotism is exposed as something essentially vulgar, as when Luca Fabio goes to the theatre in military uniform and sees the kind of emotion-stirring acts satirized in *Oh, What a Lovely War!*

> He loathed the women decked out in tricolour flags on stage, the actors who stepped forward reciting poems that sounded like prophecies; and he hid his face when the applause that greeted their appearance was directed at him too, since he was in uniform. On one of these evenings, at a music hall show, a stage painter, one of those who produce a picture in a couple of minutes while the public looks on, had drawn in coloured chalk some mountains and the sea, with a star over the sea. The audience was restive and booed. When he had finished, the patient artist, with a crafty look, wrote across the sky of his picture: *Viva Trenta e Trieste!* The applause rang out.

Alvaro's target here is the way in which certain futurist painters became involved with interventionism, in pictures such as Balla's *Patriotic Singing in the Piazza of Siena* and *Flags on the Altar of the Fatherland*, and Carrà's *Free Word Theme. Patriotic Celebration*; but he is also attacking, by implication, the whole dubious concept of "fascist art."

Alvaro also exposes the gulf between patriotic rhetoric and reality in several key episodes in the same novel. There is, first of all, the grotesque figure of the general who, addressing his junior officers, is forced to admit that preparations for war have been so hasty that it has not been possible, "as would have been desirable," to "provide junior officers with everything necessary for the successful completion of their mission. . . ." In other words, they have no maps of the war zone. Then, toward the end of the novel, there is the death of Colonel Salvi, who leads a charge in which he is killed. True, his general had always said, " 'There is not enough self-denial and sacrifice,' and 'The plan, Colonel Salvi, is to advance at all costs, there are no other orders. The troops must believe that their sacrifices are useful and they will believe that if they see that their officers are the first to charge. The first!' " The same general can only say uncomprehendingly of Salvi's death, " 'But what is that man Salvi doing? Is he mad? This is suicide!' " Suicide while the balance of the mind was disturbed was clearly the only verdict the general could pass on one who took his exhortations so much to heart. It is also Alvaro's verdict on Italy.

The satirical novels of this period naturally tend to point to the tragic consequences of Fascism's "clown-like appearance" rather than to deal with the issue in terms of comedy. Moravia's *La mascherata* (1941; The

Fancy-Dress Party) therefore seems a comparatively superficial work, his weapon the mallet rather than the stiletto, leaving a contusion over a limited area but incapable of inflicting a deep wound. The target for his attack is the Dictator's personal characteristics, and especially his capacity for being deceived not only by those around him but also by himself, together with the brusqueness with which he was reputed to conduct his sexual relations, "in which, if the truth were known, he displayed a notable diffidence and the liability to panic."[11] But to say that is to reveal the essentially literary origins of Moravia's satire, which seems to lack the element of deep personal involvement to be found in Alvaro or in Vitaliano Brancati. One notices with surprise that it was confiscated only at the second printing.

Vitaliano Brancati's *Gli anni perduti* (1941; The Lost Years) is almost the only Italian novel of the period that sounds a warning against the dangers of the *ducismo* to which Italy was succumbing in the years when the novel was written (1934–6). The plot is simple. Francesco Buscaino is a swaggering, blustering confidence man with several different, individually plausible but mutually inconsistent, lines of patter, who sees great scope for his talents in the sleepy provincial town of Natàca, a cultural backwater. Here the young men amuse themselves as best they can with trivial pastimes and preoccupations, living with their parents and treated as children still, eyeing the girls they never dare to approach. Their elders pursue futile chimeras. Buscaino's plan is to persuade these men to buy shares in a company he has founded to build an observation tower from which, on payment of the appropriate admission charge, visitors and members of the public will be able to admire the view. And with what eloquence he urges them to subscribe, as he appeals to their glorious historical and cultural heritage!

> "Natàca has never shown itself to be refractory toward plans that involve risks and sacrifices. It was here that experiments were conducted with the artificial-rain machine. Unfortunately the water drawn up from the sandy soil was saline, and the plan was unsuccessful. But it is here that men plot attempts at revolution in the republic of San Marino. And, finally, it is here that Leopoldi is inventing perpetual motion and Neri is discovering *morreale.** Natàca does not lack the spirit of initiative. It has simply, until now, been misdirected. . . ."

Above all, Buscaino exalts action for action's sake. "'Yes, my dear professor,' said Buscaino, his voice trembling and sincere. 'To move, to do something, no matter how and where, but to do something concrete! What is done, in the final analysis, is always well done; only what is not done is done badly.'" After years of labour—and wasting the best years of the lives of his youthful admirers—Buscaino succeeds. Funds are raised, the tower is built, the inaugural banquet is prepared, only for Buscaino to be informed that this tower cannot be opened to the public because of a local by-law, passed a few years before his arrival in Natàca. "It is forbidden, was basically what the paper said, it is absolutely forbidden to open to the public places such as panoramic towers, skyscrapers, etc., since experience shows that they soon become a means and an incentive to suicide." The satire on the Duce, on the cult of his personality, and on the patent absurdity of his dreams of empire-building is sharp; but equally sharp—especially from the ex-fascist Brancati, who in his early days had burnt much more than a pinch of incense at the Duce's shrine—is the comment on an Italy so frivolous and gullible as to succumb to that cult and to share those dreams.

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* *Morreale* is a universal language based on a series of absurd etymologies.

The clown-like appearance of Fascism, the buffoonery of Mussolini, are aspects of Italian life that have been fully documented and commented on by historians of the period, and were well-known at the time, as countless anti-fascist jokes and *barzellette* attest; but whereas the exploding car or piano in the clown's act at the circus merely startles and amuses, it is difficult to avoid reflecting that in Mussolini's circus the audience participated in its own destruction. Richly comic though *Gli anni perduti* is, Brancati sensed some of the tragic consequences of his villain's projects, with the result that the novel achieves a complexity and intensity that Brancati never achieved again except in the stories in *Il vecchio con gli stivali* (1945; The Old Man in Jackboots).

III

At this point one must bring into the discussion the work of Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893–1973), the most original and incisive satirist of the period as far as the novel is concerned. *La cognizione del dolore* (Acquainted with Grief) was published in book form in 1963, when Gadda was already well-known, but much of it was first published in serial form in the review *Letteratura* in 1938–41, and because Gadda wrote slowly it was presumably begun rather earlier than that. Set in the imaginary South American republic of Maradagàl between 1925 and 1933, the novel ostensibly deals with the "obscure sickness" that afflicts the engineer Gonzalo Pirabutirro d'Eltino and with his tormented relationship with his mother. It is, however, an intricate and complex work, capable of being read on different levels. To some extent, no doubt, Gonzalo's sickness is Gadda's own, its first symptoms having been described in his early *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia* (Diary of War and Imprisonment), and the portrait of Gonzalo is to some extent autobiographical. At the same time, the reader is invited to see in Maradagàl a savage parody of Italy under Mussolini, who is discreetly depicted as the volcano Akatapulqui, the "god of sulphur and flames" worshipped by the primitive, disease-ridden Indians. The references are all there—to the cult of D'Annunzio and the preservation of his house as a national monument, to the pompous Reale Accademia d'Italia ("fallen on hard times today," comments Gadda), to what Gadda (like Brancati) sees as the cultural mediocrity of Italy's middle class—and are made with a savage incisiveness that is compelling. Gadda is more acutely aware even than Brancati of the tragic consequences of Fascism: in the 1963 preface to *La cognizione* he wrote of "the catastrophizing calamities that Europe went through from 1939 to 1945," which "the less insane intellectuals must already have foreseen as early as 1934–38." The novel itself is proof that this is not simply the wisdom of hindsight.

In 1924 Maradagàl emerges from a war with Parapagàl, "a bordering state with a population of the same ethnic origin." Each of the two states insists that it has won the war and lays on the other the terrible burden of responsibility for starting it. War veterans, including the (perhaps symbolically) maimed and crippled and those who pretend to be so in order to qualify for pensions and jobs, are recruited into the "Nistituos de vigilancia para la noche," a paramilitary night-watchmen's brigade that ostensibly protects the farms and villas of the region (which bears a remarkable resemblance to Brianza). But not only is this organization powerless to prevent crime; it also indulges in acts of violence and theft itself, mainly at the expense of those proprietors who decline to take advantage of its services. At the end of the novel Gonzalo's old widowed mother is beaten up and robbed by members of the Nistituos, the blackshirts of Maradagàl, who steal her diamond ear-rings. Gonzalo is given to fits of violent rage, and the suspicion lurks in the mind of the unfortunate woman that her son may have instigated the attack; alternatively, he may be responsible for it in another sense, in that it was his avarice that prevented his mother from subscribing to the protection racket.

In part Gadda is working out, and indeed punishing himself for, his attitudes towards his own mother, as he is in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957; That Awful Mess on Via Merulana), in which a lady is murdered with the connivance of a girl to whom she has acted as a mother. But in the case of a writer as passionately cerebral and as "literary" as Gadda, and of a novel that seems to operate at various symbolic levels, it is reasonable to ask whether the figure of the dishevelled, wounded woman might not also have symbolic overtones and literary references. To frame the question in these terms is, for an Italianist, to indicate the answer. Petrarch's "Spirto gentil" and Leopardi's "All' Italia" are the two best-known Italian literary expressions of an iconographical tradition that goes back to classical sources. In these terms, Gonzalo's love-hate relationship with his mother is a metaphor for Gadda's relationship with his native Italy, which he both loves and despises for her failure to live up to his expectations—another recurrent theme, which can be traced back to his *Giornale di guerra*. In a sense, Gadda's novel is more bleakly pessimistic than Brancati's. In *Gli anni perduti*, suffused though it is with Brancati's profound misanthropy, which finds expression in insect imagery, Buscaino's folly is exposed: he is forced to flee, and the empty, unused tower remains a monument to his vanity and ambition. Gadda, at a later point in time, can see Italy on the brink of a disaster from which no one can save her. All he can do is to give expression to his frustrated love and impotent anger.

IV

It is impossible to single out any one point at which public opinion began to swing against Mussolini, for the very good reason that there were a number of occasions that provoked, in different people, crises of conscience or of confidence. For some it was the crisis that followed the murder of the socialist Giacomo Matteotti in 1924; for others—but not for many—it was the Abyssinian War; or Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, on which so much protest literature of the 1930s in England centres. For some, as for the narrator's father in Giorgio Bassani's *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (1962), it was 1938 and the promulgation of the racial laws; but for many the light did not dawn until 1940. The winter of 1936–7 marked the end of the road for a number of idealists who had hitherto supported the Fascist Party in good faith as a revolutionary movement that was going to bring into being a more just society, however ingenuous such an attitude might now appear. Although not directly about the Spanish Civil War, Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (begun late in 1936) was as much inspired by it as was Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940); it is, I believe, one of the most remarkable novels to come out of fascist Italy. Part of it was published in 1937 in *Letteratura*; it appeared in book form in 1941, published by Parenti of Florence in a limited edition of

300 copies, and in the same year was re-issued in an edition of 5000 copies by Bompiani of Milan, who by then was also Moravia's publisher.

Conversazione is written not in the naturalistic manner but in what one can only describe as an "operatic" style. (The relationship of Vittorini's technique to opera is discussed by the author in the 1948 preface to *Il garofano rosso.*) It describes, through the medium of a series of conversations, the return of the narrator Silvestro to his native Sicily at a time when he is consumed by "abstract rages," depressed by the news from Spain and China and by poverty in Milan. Initially, his return seems to be purposeless; but on the way to his village he is introduced by the "Gran Lombardo" to the concept of "other duties." " 'I think man is ripe for something else,' he said. 'Not merely in order not to steal, not to kill, etc., and to be a good citizen. . . . I think he is ripe for something else, for other, new, duties. This is what people feel, I think, the lack of other duties, other things, to fulfil. . . . Something for our consciences to do in a new sense.' " From that point on, Silvestro's journey becomes a search for these "other duties," for a morality that transcends the negative commandments of "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal."

He goes around the village with his mother, who has been deserted by her husband, and who acts as a kind of district nurse. She appears to him basically to be urging him to accept life as it is and to settle for whatever happiness he can get out of it—a solution that he, with his newly discovered but as yet undefined sense of purpose, is not disposed to accept. Leaving his mother, Silvestro then meets three men, each of them as aware as Silvestro is of the "grief of the offended world." Calogero the knife-grinder talks at first in terms that suggest a romantic longing for a violent revolution, but all too quickly finds consolation in the beauty of the world: " 'Beautiful is the world, offended but beautiful.' " Together he and Silvestro celebrate a litany of beautiful objects. Ezechiele records the offences the world has suffered, so that none shall be forgotten. Porfirio, with his cry of "*Acqua viva*" (living water), seems to be offering a religious solution—at least, the imagery of his part in the discourse seems to cry out for a religious interpretation. " 'Only living water can wash away the offences of the world and quench the thirst of the offended human race. But where is the living water?' " he asks. In revolt (or perhaps in beauty?), replies Calogero, the ambiguity of his reply remaining unresolved. In cathartic grief, replies Ezechiele. The attitudes of the three men have become mutually contradictory and as divorced from reality as Silvestro's longing for "other duties," so much so that they dismiss as pettiness the particular offences they encounter.

The four men nevertheless hail each other as brothers in spirit and betake themselves to the local wine-shop. Here they are confronted by the sinister gnome-like figure of Colombo, who offers them wine as *acqua viva* in words that, because they are a parody of the apparently noble sentiments of Calogero, Porfirio, and Ezechiele, expose to Silvestro the inadequacy of their attitudes: all they are doing is offering what Vittorini, in the first number of his post-war periodical, *Il Politecnico*, was to stigmatize as "culture as consolation." This view is reinforced by an encounter in the local cemetery with the spirit of Silvestro's brother Liborio (apparently killed in Spain) and by the subsequent scene of consolation by the war memorial "twice as big as it need have been"—the solemnity of which is undermined by Liborio's sceptical "Ehm!" Silvestro decides to leave home again. He goes to bid farewell to his mother, only to find her with a white-haired old man: her errant husband has returned. "The fool is crying," she says, as she washes his feet, an act of charity with powerful overtones, in which Vittorini embodies the expression of the positive aspect of his message. It is this rejection of the abstract, the grandiose, and the escapist that characterizes Vittorini at his best, and that makes *Conversazione in Sicilia* not only Vittorini's finest novel but a remarkable testimony to what could be done during the fascist period.

V

The phenomenon of *Conversazione in Sicilia* brings us back to our starting-point. Discussion in this essay has been limited to novelists whose themes were directly critical either of the society in which they lived or of the government that ruled them. There was of course a large body of fiction on which politics made little or no impact; but what emerges clearly from an examination of the works of Borgese, Moravia, Jovine, Alvaro, Vittorini, Brancati, and Gadda is that it was possible to say and write things under Fascism that it would simply not have been possible to say and write in a truly totalitarian state. To say that Italy under Fascism was not a fascist state is not as self-contradictory as it may seem. Space does not permit elaboration of this statement here, but I want to indicate in support of it one or two provisional conclusions concerning the situation of the novel and the evaluation of the literature of the period.

In the Italian literary heritage, pre-eminently aulic and based on tradition, the novel has been regarded until recently as an upstart genre with no real pedigree; indeed it is still so regarded by some of the more "academic" critics. Italy's major novelists all write in styles totally different from each other: Italy has many great novels, but no "great tradition" of novel-writing. The novelists of the 1920s and 1930s had therefore to forge their tools for themselves in order not only to discuss themes that their predecessors had not had to deal with, but also to communicate with a reading public to whom they must have felt they stood in a rather different relationship from their predecessors. These factors may in part explain the blurred focus in some novels to which I have referred, or the ambiguity of attitude that could arise in a period in which it was by no means easy to decide which was the side of the angels. They could also explain the appeal of much American fiction, which was felt to be capable of interpretation on two levels, the literal and the symbolic. And it is not surprising that those novelists were most successful who either adopted for their own purposes methods used by others—Moravia deriving much from Svevo, Vittorini from his reading of Americans—or took, in a sense, a simplified line of approach or adopted uncomplicated partisan attitudes—the nonconformists such as Moravia, the satirists such as Brancati, the passionate protesters such as Vittorini. (Gadda is the most original novelist we have discussed, and *La cognizione del dolore* is unfinished.) It is tempting, in fact, to suggest that the techniques most successfully used by the novelists we have been discussing were that of the "*un*fascist hero" in the 1920s and early 1930s and that of satire in the late 1930s. The situation does not seem to have demanded, or inspired, great subtlety in the use of indirect or oblique comment.

Considerations such as these must inevitably influence assessments of the literature of the fascist period as a whole. Simplified normative judgments seem to me to take too little account of the complexities of history as it is lived by fallible men and women, as distinct from history as it is written by equally fallible historians. Much in this period is no more to be correlated with Mussolini's Fascism than the gorgeous academic dress of some of our newer universities is to be correlated with the identity of the prime minister under whom they received their charters; and even in the sphere with which we have been concerned there is enough good writing to make one want to revise the over-generalized statements, which one still meets all too frequently, concerning the supposed drab cultural mediocrity imposed on Italy by the fascists. However difficult life may have become for particular groups at particular times, the fascists never really achieved a stranglehold on Italian cultural life, and the much-vaunted renaissance of Italian culture after 1943 is firmly rooted in the fascist period.

References

1. For an account of these debates see G. MANACORDA, *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940–1965)* (Rome 1967), Ch. I, "Le polemiche letterarie del dopoguerra," pp. 3–27.
2. S. J. WOOLF, "Italy," in *European Fascism*, ed. by S. J. Woolf (London 1968), p. 52.
3. On this aspect of Gentile's criticism, see P. MAZZAMUTO, "Gentile critico," in G. GRANA (ed.), *Letteratura italiana. I critici. Per la storia della filologia e della critica moderna in Italia*, Vol. II (Milan 1969), pp. 1561–70.
4. WOOLF, *op. cit.*
5. G. BOTTAI, *Politica fascista delle arti* (Rome 1940), p. 118. The phrase *torbide indifferenze* is probably a reference to Moravia's *Gli indifferenti.* (Except where indicated, all translations from the Italian in this chapter are mine.)
6. See H. GOLLWITZER, *Europe in the Age of Imperialism, 1880–1914*, trans. by G. Adam (London 1969), Ch. XI.
7. It is sometimes pointed out—as, for instance, in L. RUSSO, *I narratori* (Milan/Messina 1958), p. 144—that Oriani owed his reputation largely to an essay in rehabilitation by Benedetto Croce ("Alfredo Oriani," in *La Critica* VII [Naples 1909], reprinted in his *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, Vol. III [Naples 1915]). But Croce could not foresee the cult of *Oriani precursore*, which had no basis in his sober appraisal and which he trenchantly attacked in his later essay, "Oriani postumo," in *La Critica* XXXIII (Naples 1935), reprinted in *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, Vol. VI (Naples 1940). Nor should one forget the notes on Oriani in *La Critica* XXXII (Naples 1934) and "Oriani nelle scuole," in *La Critica* XXXIX (Naples 1941).
8. His surprise, however, was rather ingenuous: by 1933–4 the fascists no longer needed to administer punitive beatings or large doses of castor oil to ensure conformity. Vittorini himself senses that the violence of the early and mid-1920s was a thing of the past; hence the splendid irony of the situation in which the eager young fascist Mainardi is described in the press as a "subverter of the order re-established by Fascism."
9. LEONIDA RÉPACI, *Storia dei Rupe*, Vol. I: *Principio di secolo* (Milan 1969), p. 7.
10. From *Selected Poems of Eugenio Montale*, trans. and with an introduction by George Kay (paperback: Harmondsworth 1969).
11. EVELYN WAUGH, *Vile Bodies* (paperback: Harmondsworth 1951), p. 11.

Note I should like to express my gratitude to Miss L. A. Zaina, of the University of Liverpool, for useful discussions during the writing of this chapter.

CHAPTER 12

German Literature and the Experience of Nazism

Hans Egon Holthusen[*]

I

If we ask what the experience of Nazism has meant for German literature, how German writers have treated it or come to terms with it, it should be made clear at once from what point of view this question is being considered. We have no intention of answering it, for instance, by producing here a history of national socialist literature. Such ideologically orthodox literature as was inspired by Hitler's doctrines is not very interesting in any genuinely literary sense. Those writers of substance who for a while felt some sympathy for Nazi ideas, or for particular elements contained in them, all—without exception—turned away from them, in most cases rather soon and in so decisive a manner that one may confidently assert that National Socialism and literature are incompatible. We are assuming, then, that authentic literature must be the expression of a sensitive and intelligent humanity.

The literature we shall consider in answering our question was written outside the grip of Nazi ideological control and for the most part after the end of the Nazi regime. One of the basic assumptions of this literature is the almost universal agreement that the national socialist period does not constitute just one stretch of German history like any other, but rather a political and moral scandal of quite unparalleled proportions, and a challenge to the conscience of every right-thinking man. A second assumption is that this period was brought to a close by the holocaust of 1945, and is now over. There are no constitutional or ideological links between the years before and the years after 1945, no feeling of continuity that might inhibit a German writer from pursuing, in all sincerity, his critical confrontation with the past as far as it can possibly be taken.

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[*] Professor of German, Northwestern University, Evanston.

It is this conception of National Socialism in Germany that has constantly recurred as a literary theme of inescapable urgency: Nazism as a period of evil destiny that has been outlived but cannot be forgotten, because its consequences are far-reaching; Nazism as a period of crime and degradation, as a monstrous way of life, as a political enigma and a moral outrage. This theme has been truly epoch-making. Not only has it preoccupied the imagination and conscience of several generations of writers, from Thomas Mann (1875–1955) to Peter Handke (b. 1942), as no other subject has done; it has also considerably influenced the sense of literary tradition in Germany, changing accepted standards of appreciation and giving rise to a new view of the meaning of literary work and the social responsibility of the writer. The sheer quantity as well as the variety of writing on this theme has been so great in every genre of literature that it would be impossible to catalogue it fully here. The following account will be based on only a few examples, but characteristic ones, drawn almost entirely from the fiction published since the war in West Germany; but these will give some idea of how the Germans have tried to assess the meaning of their own past.

One question of central importance, which had been raised already before 1933 and which it has so far not been possible to answer definitively, concerns the historical "legitimacy" of the Hitler movement. Should Nazi doctrines be seen as a typically German ideology? Should the *Götterdämmerung* of 1945 be regarded as the necessary final consequence of the political history of the German nation? Or is what happened to be seen as a kind of accident, a fault in the political machine, that might have been avoided with a bit more luck and sense? Among the genuinely great men of modern German history and culture there is really no one whom we could seriously compare or associate with Hitler; neither Hegel nor Nietzsche, for instance, could possibly be cited in this connection, and the same is true of Bismarck and Wagner. At the same time, elements from the legacy left by these men, or derivatives from their legacy, can be found in the crude and contradictory hotch-potch of ideas propagated under Nazism as the official German *Weltanschauung*. Just how painfully difficult it is to disentangle this problem becomes clear if we compare the 12 years of Nazi rule with the 1200 years of German history that preceded it. Many manifestations of the Hitler period, if not everything about it, seem to be "very German"; yet all its most specifically German features, and every markedly national characteristic and tradition, appear in some distorted, debased, and demoralized form, like a parody of themselves. One may feel in the end that, far from being genuinely German, Nazism represents a malign counterfeit of all that Germany once was in the eyes of her friends, represents in fact a diabolical and mocking imitation.

Thomas Mann dwelt on this disturbing ambiguity in the problem of what Germany "is" in a lecture, delivered a few weeks after the end of World War II in the Library of Congress (Washington), entitled "Germany and the Germans." In those days it was common for writers to distinguish between a "good" and a "bad" Germany; Thomas Mann asked whether such a distinction was permissible, whether it made sense. Toward the end of his lecture he summed up his own view of Germany's progress towards catastrophe as follows:

> It is a melancholy story—I call it melancholy and make no mention of any tragic element in it, because misfortune must not give itself airs. One thing this story should bring home to us is this: that there are not two Germanys, one good and one bad, but a single Germany whose best qualities were turned to evil by satanic cunning. The bad Germany is the good one gone astray, the good one plunged into misfortune, into guilt and defeat. That is why it is impossible for a German-born mind to disown the bad, guilt-laden Germany, and to declare: "I am the good, the noble, the just Germany arrayed in white; I leave you the bad Germany, to be exterminated." None of what I have tried to tell, or briefly suggest to you, concerning Germany has been stated as plain, impersonal, objective fact. I know it all from within myself, I have experienced it all in my own life.[1]

Thomas Mann was then 70 years old, and it is appropriate to regard him here as the leading representative of the generation of writers born before 1900. The summit of their career was passed by the end of the war, and they had all been entangled in that "melancholy" story in one way or another: some, such as Gottfried Benn, had been supporters for a while of the Nazi regime; others, such as Ernst Jünger, had voiced views, or diagnoses of "the age," that could be understood as pro-fascist; others again, such as Hans Carossa, had accepted compromising appointments. After the war many of these men were to be seen justifying themselves in print.[2] Thomas Mann, whose militant anti-Fascism, confirmed by early emigration, was known to everyone, was in a position to react differently: he could, and indeed felt that he must, confess to a kind of personal involvement in the aberrant course of German history toward disaster.

He had always been impressed by a sense of the high importance of being a "German-born mind." During World War I, 30 years before his lecture in Washington, he had written his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*

(1918; Meditations of a Non-Political Man), a wide-ranging cultural and political treatise on the subject of Germany and the Germans. It was inspired by conservative patriotic sentiments, and in fact it remains the most important manifesto of educated conservatism in recent German literature. This book must have been an almost unbearable embarrassment to its author in 1945, when Thomas Mann was a staunch adherent of Roosevelt's crusade against European Fascism, not because the book was bad, but because it was so extraordinarily good. For what he had succeeded in doing, in the heat of wartime feeling and with appalling virtuosity, was to argue a formidable case against the enlightened democracies of the West and for the authoritarian and conservative Reich created by Bismarck (which happened also to be rather progressive in its social policies). He argued this case with an intellectual brilliance and cosmopolitan sophistication that makes it hard to resist even today. He directed his arguments particularly against the liberal intellectual and revolutionary spokesman of Western democratic civilization, in order to defend German inwardness with its roots in music and religion, an inwardness that was *machtgeschützt*, as he called it: power-protected inwardness. Against the facile rhetoric of the belletrist he opposed the pessimistic wisdom and honesty of an older view of life, founded on a feeling for the values of "the cross, death, and the grave"; it was all part of the same case against Rousseau and Zola, and in defence of Luther, Bismarck, Eichendorff, Wagner, and Pfitzner.

Thomas Mann was, beyond question, a German nationalist, "a man born with a peculiar talent for patriotism and a bent for zealous and militant love of country," as he was once described by *The Observer*.[3] After 1918 he was converted to the values of the West, and in 1945 he was the most distinguished spokesman of the anti-fascist *émigrés*; but does this mean that he had become an essentially different person? One may well doubt it, for his preoccupation with the German catastrophe in 1945 and his passionate interpretation of it are inspired by precisely the same system of ideas, cultural perspectives, and conflicting categories as had occupied him during the years 1914–18. What has changed, of course, is the emphasis of his approval and disapproval, rather than the analysis itself; originally what was "German" had an ideal, impressive, and attractive aura, whereas later the very concept comes to mean something altogether questionable and doom-laden. And the same change of tone takes place as regards whatever is "un-German." Music, for example, had once symbolized all that was best in the German soul, and the irrationalism of German Romantic poetry had been enthusiastically praised and preferred above all the banal rhetoric of progress, freedom, and justice that was held to typify the Western democracies. In Washington in 1945 Thomas Mann simply put his case the other way round, arguing that it is "just this musical cast of soul that wreaks such havoc in spheres not its own—in the political sphere above all, where men must live and act together." He deals in the same way now with Luther, that key figure in Germany's spiritual history, and with German Romanticism, and with all his former examples: "Luther was a champion of freedom—German-style, for he had no understanding of what freedom is."[4]

When one considers how much Thomas Mann enjoys using, as a basic artistic principle of his narrative art, opposing roles that can be switched around and confused, one may be tempted to see in his later reversal of his earlier political ideas evidence less of a change of heart than of a "musical" play with variations on an ideological theme. In 1918, after he had finished his *Betrachtungen*, he himself described it as an "artistic book, the product of an artistic mind." And an artistic mind, he said, is not used to expressing itself directly: "It expresses itself through borrowed voices, making people and things speak for it, letting ideas speak, in fact, for themselves, even when it may appear that the artist is voicing his own ideas directly and himself believes that this is what he is doing. This book was certainly nowhere quite free from a touch of role-playing and special pleading . . . ideas were given free play, with both artistic licence and artistic detachment . . . ."[5] In the altered situation of 1945, this kind of scepticism toward his own political judgment was no longer permissible. However much one may question Thomas Mann's diagnoses, and doubt whether there is any connection between Hitler's rise to power and German musicality or Lutheran theology, one is bound to respect his realization that his former enjoyment of aesthetic licence and detachment was no longer an acceptable attitude where vital issues of political survival were at stake, and where the course of historical events itself had drawn the clearest possible distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood.

Two years before the end of World War II, Thomas Mann had begun work on a novel that was to deal with the problem of Germany in the same terms as those he used in his Washington lecture. What a daring undertaking it was, almost like a race run alongside and against the actual development of the historical catastrophe. It was to be nothing less than the story of the "German soul," as exemplified by the fate of Faust, a favourite hero in German literary history, being descended from the age of Luther, and regarded since Goethe as the quintessential incarnation of the German character. The difference was that now Faust had to be endowed also with a typically modern consciousness, and could no longer be saved, like Goethe's hero, but had to go to Hell by reason of a spiritual law no less clear and compelling than that which damned the criminal German regime to the very downfall that was occurring as the novel was being written. To present Faust's damnation, then, as a parallel and "objective correlative" to the horrifying collapse that seemed to be bringing German history to a meaningless end: this was the task Thomas Mann had set himself, in an act clearly of rivalry with Goethe and in order to reject Goethe's benignly harmonious solution of the Faust problem. The decisive step toward realizing this conception of the story came with the transformation of Faust the scholar into Faust as musician and composer. As Thomas Mann later said in Washington: "For Faust to be the representative of the German soul, he would have to be musical."[6]

Thus *Doktor Faustus* (1947) is the story of a German composer called Adrian Leverkühn, who sells his soul to the Devil in order to enjoy an agreed "hourglass-full of the devil's most inspired time," that is, a period of years during which he will no longer be confined within the depressingly stale and exhausted conventions of his art; he will be allowed to "break through" to a new form of expression. This tragic character-study and life-story of an altogether symbolic German is not conceived imaginatively in the manner of other literary personages, but is composed intellectually from the theoretical material of Thomas Mann's accumulated reflections on Germany. Leverkühn's make-up combines features based on the Faust of folklore, the necromancer of the old chap-book (1587), with themes based on Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky; it combines modern psychology with passages of theology and demonology written in the language of Luther, and an old-fashioned Faustian magic of the elements with the passion for experiment typical of the Schönberg revolution in modern music. Thomas Mann's aim here—as it had been in *Der Zauberberg* (1924; The Magic Mountain) and before that in the *Betrachtungen*—is to depict the entire intellectual panorama of the age. This time its most sombre aspects predominate, and the highlights fall on the dangerous points of transition, where sophistication turns into barbarism, and over-developed critical consciousness seeks a new simplicity. In this way strangely fascinating analogies are established between apparently quite disparate developments: for example, between the daring effects of modern music and those adventures in the ideological and political sphere that can lead from democracy to Fascism.

This is all somewhat too subtly elaborate to be entirely convincing.

The linking of *avant-garde* brilliance in the arts with fascist brutality has been much questioned, and rightly so. Thomas Mann, it has been argued,[7] treated "Germany" as an altogether too symbolic entity, both here and in the *Betrachtungen.* Nevertheless, *Doktor Faustus* must be counted among Thomas Mann's major achievements, and it is undoubtedly one of the most important literary confrontations with National Socialism to have been written in German. It is a work less of accusation than of lament, the lament of a great German prose-writer as he bids farewell to a whole epoch in the spiritual and intellectual history of his country. He laments the passing not only of this massive and disturbing epoch itself, but of the 1000 years of German history that lie behind it; and as he watches the satanic destruction of that Germany, he is sick at heart for his homeland. He feels the homesickness of an *émigré* for the country Germany used to be, or seemed once to have been, in the irresistible power and inwardness of its musical genius—Germany as the land of childhood, as a lost paradise, as "Utopia realized," as it were, by courtesy of its music. Nowhere is this homesickness more overpoweringly expressed than in Chapter 8 of the novel, in a passage on the theme and variations in the second movement of Beethoven's last piano sonata, Op. 111, where Mann attempts to paraphrase in words one of the greatest manifestations of German music.

In German, tribulation (*Heimsuchung*) is connected with homesickness (*Heimweh*) and homeland (*Heimat*) not only etymologically but also theologically and musically, and Mann, the homesick *émigré*, confesses in *Doktor Faustus* to his sense of spiritual solidarity with his country in its hour of greatest tribulation, even though he well knows what moral guilt has brought down this misery and ruin. The climax of his lament comes toward the end of the novel, when Adrian Leverkühn plays his most radical composition, "Dr Fausti Weheklag," before a small audience of friends. He composes this work shortly before his collapse into madness and death; it is Faustus's lament for his lost and damned soul, and it represents a kind of crazy, but sincere, attempt by Leverkühn to "take back" Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, especially the idealistic Hymn to Joy. Yet he ends the composition finally on a high G, a note that has become famous for its symbolic suggestion of a hope beyond despair.

In the last sentences of the novel the motif of the lament undergoes a last variation, as it is translated into the simple, loving language of Leverkühn's friend Serenus Zeitblom (the narrator of the story throughout), and this produces the ultimate transition from lament to prayer. After Zeitblom has reported Leverkühn's death in August 1940—he is supposed to be writing this last page near the end of the war—he concludes his narrative and the book with the unforgettable words:

> Germany then was reeling, with hectically flushed cheeks, on the crest of hideous triumphs, in the process of winning the world through the strength of the only pact the country intended to keep, a pact it had signed with its own blood. Today Germany is plunging, in the grip of daemons, with a hand over one eye while the other stares into horror, from despair into ever deeper despair. When will it reach the bottom of the pit? When will the light of hope dawn, a miracle passing all belief, beyond the last extinction of all hope? Here a lonely man folds his hands and prays: God have mercy on your poor soul, my friend, my fatherland.

II

When *Doktor Faustus* finally appeared, in the autumn of 1947 in Stockholm, the beginnings of a new, post-fascist literature were appearing in Germany. A generation of "the defeated," who were at the same time also "the liberated," now made themselves heard. What these men had experienced was not necessarily the "descent into Hell" that the author of *Doktor Faustus* had imagined, but it was certainly much more than mere military defeat on however grand a scale, more even than the political collapse of a regime that had for years ruled most of Europe. They had experienced the break-up of the historical structures of the German nation, the atomization of German society into sheer individuals, who, if they were able to survive at all, had no other political or legal status than that of survivors. This situation of *tabula rasa* had about it—for those young and strong enough to endure it—a certain anarchistic exhilaration, a heady sense of being absolutely free, which nourished many extravagant hopes. It was simultaneously, however, a situation burdened by the *Schuldfrage*[8] (the problem of guilt), as it was everywhere called in the endless discussions of the time: whether or to what extent individuals, although they might be innocent in a legal sense, shared a common guilt for the crimes that had been committed in the name of the people. And if they did, what meaning did this shared guilt, this communal arraignment, have and what consequences ought one to draw from what had happened?

In those days writing seemed to be possible only as a contribution to the moral reclamation of a country that had been devastated by 12 years of rule by a gang of depraved men. "The immense task of post-war literature," as Heinrich Böll (b. 1917) described it 20 years later, was to "rediscover places and a sense of belonging together." The task was a moral and political one, and the phrase he used—*Orte und Nachbarschaft* (places and neighbourhood)—was poetic shorthand for a rational and humane life in common. But moral commitment is not the same thing as writing, which requires finding an appropriate form of language in a morally challenging situation. To make a new beginning in literature meant for Böll "a search for a livable language in a habitable country." He believed that not only the country had been laid waste, but the German language as well. That was why he could say, for instance: "People still do not realize just how much was involved in the writing even of half a sentence of German prose in 1945."[9]

There were, of course, other writers who saw much less of a problem in using German again for literary purposes. The fiction that appeared in the first years after the war had generally a rather provisional, improvised character, suggesting the fag-end of an old tradition rather than the beginning of a new one. There was much talk of "baldness" as a stylistic ideal; that is, of deliberately rejecting all higher artistic effects in favour of letting the bald, unadorned facts speak for themselves in all their literalness. In truth, however, this ideal was rather a way of disguising and excusing the inability of the imagination to respond adequately to the overpowering mass of the facts. A rugged journalistic realism was cultivated, artless in form but sensational in content, especially in the early books about the war—for instance in Theodor Plievier's huge trilogy *Stalingrad*, *Moskau*, and *Berlin* (1945–54), the first volume of which became particularly famous. To the same genre belong Hans Werner Richter's *Die Geschlagenen* (1949; Beyond Defeat), and even Willi Heinrich's much later novel *Das geduldige Fleisch* (1955; The Willing Flesh), and so does the *Memorial* of the communist resistance fighter Günther Weisenborn, who was released by the Red Army from Spandau in 1945.

There was besides a host of publications with highflown titles taken from the vocabulary of stylized religious or mythological rhetoric: *De profundis*, *Dies irae*, *Leviathan*, *Totentanz* (Dance of Death), and so on. It was tempting to fall into this kind of style at the time, although no very discriminating reader was likely to be impressed by it. Another common stylistic tendency was toward quite unrealistic, parabolical, or fantastic modes of expression, which abandoned the conventions of time and space, plot, characterization, and so forth, and used surrealistic effects to convey the appalling distortions of the world that had been experienced. Such effects are to be found, for instance, in Hermann Kasack's once celebrated novel *Die Stadt hinterm Strom* (1947; The City Beyond the River), or in Hans Erich Nossack's *Nekyia* (1947) and *Interview mit dem Tode* (1948;

Interview with Death), or in *Nein—die Welt des Angeklagten* (1950; No—the World of the Accused) by Walter Jens (b. 1923). It was during these years that Franz Kafka's work was rediscovered and placed among the classics of modern literature, and the looming influence of his work can be felt in these experimental writings and many others of the same sort. We should also note, however, that in Germany the inspiration provided by Kafka's writing was never really assimilated or developed into anything resembling the existentialist and committed literature of post-war France (as exemplified by Camus, for instance). The disciples of Kafka in Germany for the most part achieved nothing of any substance, or did so only when they turned aside from his example to discover new styles of their own, generally in the direction of realism.[10]

By 1950 it was clear that realism had won the day over other styles of prose. This new realism proved to be the most effective, and from the public's point of view the most plausible, manner in which a German writer could tackle the problem of National Socialism. For the writers of the first post-war generation, realism signified above all a rejection of everything that had been officially praised (or even simply accepted) during the Hitler period, a rejection of the so-called "blood and soil" cult in the peasant novels of the time, of all the idealization of militaristic and nationalistic heroes, and of all other expressions of fascist ideology. In addition, realism implied a rejection of the patriarchal, self-consciously cultured attitudes associated with the style of the German 19th-century novel. The new realism took a stand against all false ("idealistic") high-mindedness, of the kind that had pretended to maintain the traditions of Goethe and Stifter under Hitler and thus to ignore politics; a stand, too, against the very "German inwardness" that Thomas Mann had praised, but that was now attacked with aggressive determination as escapism from the reality of social existence, as political cowardice, indeed even as culpable neglect of civic responsibilities. In the eyes of these new realists reality was first and last a social matter, and the role of the writer in society should no longer be that of a contemplative outsider, but rather that of a critical, committed "political animal."

Similar ideas were gaining credence at the time in other western European countries, particularly in France and Italy. Literature as "the exercise of freedom," or more radically still, literature as "the subjectivity of a society in a state of permanent revolution," was the definition of his subject given by Sartre, then the ruling theoretician of the Left, in *What is Literature?* (1947). Sartre owed many of his most important ideas to German philosophy, especially to Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger, and he now exerted a strong influence in his turn on the younger generation of German writers. The gap separating Germany from the West, which Thomas Mann had once noted and approved, seemed to have been closed. And yet the act of writing, understood in this new social and critical sense, had a quite different significance in Germany from that attributed to it elsewhere. How could a German writer hope to respond adequately to the political challenges of the age until he had come to terms with the Nazi question (whatever these terms might be supposed to be)? All efforts at engagement with the present political situation were overshadowed by the ghosts of the past, and thus made more complex and frustrating. The view of the present was distorted by these shadows from the past, with the result that some people tried, for instance, to establish analogies between the Nazi regime and the supposedly "restoration" government of Adenauer (who in fact had been an unswerving opponent of Hitler). Although the situation was now so utterly changed, these radicals tried to make up for the sins of omission committed by the older generation by protesting against the politics of the new Federal Republic. They wanted to show how totalitarian tyranny ought to be resisted—with literary weapons. They projected the image of their enemy onto post-war German society, with all its democratic institutions, whose benefits they were actually enjoying, yet whose political consciousness they fiercely strove to revolutionize. They thereby created a problem that, by its very nature, was bound to become deeply divisive.

The writers who made a name for themselves at that time were, along with Heinrich Böll, talented men such as Alfred Andersch (b. 1914) and Wolfgang Koeppen (b. 1906); the name of Gerd Gaiser (b. 1908) should also be mentioned here, as a highly, though briefly, successful outsider. Andersch was arrested in 1933 on account of his communist views and spent several months in a concentration camp before being released; on the Italian front in 1944 he boldly deserted and gave himself up into American captivity. He has described his escape from the hated Nazi regime in his autobiographical essay "Die Kirschen der Freiheit" (1947; The Cherries of Freedom), in which he interprets his action in Sartrean terms as an assertion of his essential freedom. His first novel, *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* (1957; Flight to Afar), is set in the 1930s and tells the story of a group whose resistance to the regime leads to death or exile. But already in his second novel, *Die Rote* (1960; The Redhead), the scene changes to the business world of post-war Germany, where a young woman is similarly determined to escape, but from a complicated adultery. The basic motif of escape or desertion overseas has been translated here into a situation of sexual conflict with society on the one hand, and a kind of sentimental anti-capitalism on the other, which is really no more than revulsion against a prosperous consumer society. In a soap-opera sub-plot the same old villain and hero are dragged in again: a Nazi and an underground resistance fighter, locked in mortal hatred. Similarly, Wolfgang Koeppen, in his three novels *Tauben im Gras* (1951; Doves in the Grass), *Das Treibhaus* (1953; The Greenhouse), and *Der Tod in Rom* (1954; Death in Rome), is concerned essentially with the present consequences of the Nazi catastrophe—the moral desert of the post-war years, and the deep-rooted persistence of the Nazi contagion in a society that has not changed fundamentally despite superficial efforts at denazification. *Das Treibhaus* was the first satire of any literary interest directed against the new "establishment" in Bonn.

For Heinrich Böll (b. 1917), too, who was the most successful author of this group, the question of the connection between the situation as it used to be and as it now was (but ought not to be) was a theme of central importance. He alone managed to find largely convincing ways of dealing with the problem of double perspective that arises from the experience of living with the ghost of an unexorcized past. And he was the first to find a convincing style acceptable to millions of readers both inside Germany and abroad. His work marks a literary epoch, and is in a sense as representative of the first 20 years of the Federal Republic as is Konrad Adenauer himself, its founding chancellor and, like Böll, a Rhinelander, a Catholic, and a native of the ancient and once holy city of Cologne. Despite Böll's evident differences, as an opponent of the established Church and a bitter critic of the Catholic bourgeoisie, as a rabid moralist in political matters and a sympathizer in attitude and behaviour with the plebeian sections of the people, he nevertheless shares traits of deep-seated kinship with his enemy: an indelibly Catholic cast of mind and an unmistakable Rhineland wit and humour.

In 1959 Böll published his novel *Billard um halb zehn* (Billiards at Half Past Nine); within the compass of a single day it tells the story of three generations in the family of a Rhineland architect called Fähmel. It may not be Böll's best book, but it is a good example of his technique and themes. The narrative is conducted by way of recollection; the author's attention does not move forward (as in epic narrative), but keeps making excursions into the past from a vantage-point safely established after the event. The family story is presented as a sequence of skilfully interlocking "contributions" made by the various surviving relatives, which gradually reveal more and more about their common past and involvement in vaster historical issues. These contributions are expressed sometimes in a straightforward narrative style, sometimes as a voiceless inner monologue, but they all deal, from different subjective points of view, with the same theme, the details of which develop into a number of *leit-motifs*: the childhood and youth of the old head of the family (who on the day of the story is celebrating his 80th birthday); his career, boldly planned and pursued with much energy and good luck; his marriage, and his children, and his grandchildren; family births and deaths; places that change and places that remain the same; the town seen through the studio window, with the life of its streets forever repeating itself, yet forever new—people and things, nuns, students, officers, boxes of vegetables in front of the greengrocer's shop, and the dead carcasses outside the butcher's, with the blood dripping onto the ground.

Böll's narrative technique reads rather like a moral ledger, in which the family's spiritual accounts are being kept for the day of judgment; the book is inspired by a stern passion for passing moral verdicts, in the light of each person's positive or negative relationship to power. The all-recording eye, which observes the ordinary round of life going on always much the same outside the studio window, sees the perpetual, ineradicable presence of evil forever reproducing itself in some new form in German history. Evil is quite simply power, not only military power, but all kinds of force and violence used against people. The bullies and toughs of the school playing-fields are already guilty of it, as we see in the story of Robert Fähmel's exploits as a sixth-former (he is the "hero" of the middle generation). Böll characterizes this evil in pseudo-religious terms, condemning all those who have "partaken of the sacrament of the ox," including Robert's brother Otto, the only member of the family to become a Nazi. (He is then scarcely a person any more, but the mere husk of a human being, and in this condition he finally loses his life in Russia.)

On the other side we have those who have eaten "of the sacrament of the lamb"; they are the persecuted, who resist and say No—rather like a sect following the example of the early Christians. One of them is martyred as the result of an abortive attack on the gymnastics teacher (a future police chief), and others disappear forever. Robert Fähmel has to flee, emigrating to nearby Holland, but later he is amnestied, allowed to study at university and even to become an officer. Toward the end of the war he finds himself in the position of having to blow up, for tactical reasons, the abbey of St Anton, which his father had built and which his son Joseph is to rebuild many years later.[11]

Böll repeats the basic pattern of *Billard um halb zehn* in all his major works, such as *Ansichten eines Clowns* (1963; The Clown), *Entfernung von der Truppe* (1964; Absent Without Leave), *Ende einer Dienstfahrt* (1967; End of a Mission), and again in *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (1971; Group Portrait with Lady), which won him a Nobel Prize in 1972. He has continued to construct his plots in the same way, building up his narrative around a moral conflict in which good and evil are equated with power and resistance to power (power appearing often in the guise of the "establishment"). His sympathy lies with a syndrome of morally positive elements, generally identified as "proletarian," "Christian," and "anti-fascist," while the opposite syndrome is constituted by "bourgeois," "clerical," and "pro-fascist." Böll has an apparently immovable liking for blunt moral conclusions, even for undisguised political incitement, and this makes his otherwise shrewd and sarcastically witty style less convincing wherever it intrudes. His strength lies in his ability to find just the right language to convey a whole range of moods and attitudes, scenes and settings, that typify post-war German society. The sultry atmosphere of prosperity in the Federal Republic, the morally depressing character of its self-assurance, all the lack of inspiration, combined with restless activity, that has blindly rebuilt Germany, destroying again by such mindless reconstruction the already ruined towns, and over it all the shadow of a past that nothing can remove and no one can escape: it is this that Böll's melancholy and sarcastic style expresses so well, with an underlying tone of elegiac regret and a strong dose of humour.

Böll's rival in the 1950s was Gerd Gaiser (b. 1908), a novelist of considerable stature, although distinctly an outsider as regards the group of writers we have been considering. He grew up amid the conservative traditions of a Swabian pastor's family; he was educated in the classics, and as a boy was a member of the *Jugendbewegung*, that idealistic youth movement dating back to the Kaiser's Germany that was still alive in the 1920s, its rebellion against bourgeois society brim-full of enthusiasm for nature and dreams of a new mode of life. This same idealism led Gaiser, during the last critical years of the Weimar Republic, into the camp of the national socialists, where he was a true "believer" and fervent enthusiast for the cause, serving eventually as a fighter pilot in Norway and the Balkans. This political involvement was to become his chief preoccupation in his writing after 1945. Now he was concerned above all with the discovery of the truth, which for him manifested itself primarily in catastrophe and as catastrophe, making him realize the error of his ways. This conversion to the truth, however, has not meant for Gaiser any automatic obligation to some other form of commitment.

His story about the defeat of the German air force in Norway, *Sterbende Jagd* (1953; The Last Squadron), became particularly famous and was for a long time considered to be the best German book about the war. Unlike Böll's *Wo warst du Adam?* (1951; Adam, Where Art Thou?), Gaiser's novel is narrated by an officer in a style appropriate to his upper-class background; the language is steeped in culture and tradition, while at the same time competently managing a modern technical vocabulary. Of course, Gaiser no longer believes, any more than Böll does, in the "meaning" of war in terms of those traditional values that are echoed in the poetry of Horace and Hölderlin, for which every German grammar-school teacher before 1918 (and many a one even after 1918) was ready to go through fire. But he does not therefore lose all sense of the meaning of heroism, which he continues to see in the way ordinary soldiers carry out their orders and above all endure pain and hardship. Their heroism is one of understatement, it is even senseless, in that it lacks political or ideological justification, yet it is still a kind of heroism. Gaiser depicts the tragedy of a body of men doomed to a pointless fate, a trained band of ironical disbelievers who are not seen to die, but simply disappear from the scene forever, one after the other. It is a book full of brittle melancholy and suggestive reticence as regards the monstrous moral situation of the German soldier. "There's no way out of this," someone says at one point, "you're not the kind of person to abandon your mother or your wife, just because the devil's in her."

The man whose conservative loyalty here prompts him to liken his country to his mother or his wife is a squadron leader decorated with the highest military order; yet he has no illusions about the character of the war in which he is involved, nor about its inevitable outcome. One night, as he stands in front of the portrait of his commander-in-chief, he calls him a "madman," and declares: "I hate him. I hate him like the plague." But he does not consider resistance or desertion; he looks upon his own situation in terms appropriate to a classical tragedy: "Whether you want to or not, you have to become guilty." Chapter 46 of *Sterbende Jagd* ends with the words: "God has sent him to us, he thought, and he must surely ruin us. I understand this and yet I don't understand it. But I cannot get out of it, and I cannot alter it. *Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse.*"

Gaiser is the only writer of importance in his generation who does not resort to some form of social criticism in dealing with the problem of the past. He does not accuse others, either the German people or particular social classes, institutions, and so on, but seeks the blame—however this is interpreted—within himself. But he is the only writer, too, who does not draw any practical conclusions from past experiences or past guilt, but advocates apparently a kind of mystical resignation: "To abstain from action is better than action."[12] In other words, he is a man who would rather understand than change the world.

What can be the point of understanding the world if one does not wish to change it? There is evidently a kind of understanding that makes any prospect that things might be different appear illusory and hopeless, viewed against the ghastly irrevocability of things as they already are. If it is true that all desire to change the world, and particularly the desire to correct the past, rests on a fundamentally optimistic view of the human condition, then the basis of Gaiser's sense of life's meaning is grounded in defeat. "To learn the nature of being in shipwreck"—this lapidary phrase, with which Karl Jaspers once concluded and summed up the three volumes of his *Philosophy* (1932), might be taken as a formula for Gaiser's attempts to comprehend the experience of Hitler's war.

We see, then, why precisely the military catastrophe should be so important for Gaiser, appearing to him again and again in a symbolic light, as a symbol, one might almost say, of itself. "Everything was clear because nothing could be seen," as he says of one such moment of illumination, "gravity suspended, balance weird. We no longer moved, but irrevocably it came to us, entirely clear now, reality was the only symbol and the symbol the reality." This passage occurs in the story *Gib acht in Domokosch* (Watch Out in Domokosch), which takes place during the retreat of the German army through Rumania or Bessarabia in the late summer of 1944, at a moment when all movement seems to have ceased. The protagonist is a wounded flight lieutenant, his sense of balance damaged, who is stranded behind the lines at a staff base whose function is mysterious and sinister. He is in a heightened clairvoyant state brought on by fever and brandy in the middle of the night, and this enables him to decipher the truth of his present circumstances. Here the truth appears in the form not of an insoluble problem, as in *Sterbende Jagd*, but of a mythological symbol drawn from the dark fringes of Greek legend: "Hecate called at the crossroads, and Medusa was beautiful even though she turned men to stone. Light in my feet, I became a dry stone." Truth is here Medusa's face, and all who look upon it are turned to stone. A second meaning is also suggested by this symbol: namely, that being turned to stone affords a kind of protection, or counter-effect, against the Dionysian release of vital forces, the force particularly of the earth, as this is manifested in the landscape of Domokosch: "its excess, its fertility that aroused horror."

In 1960 a first-rate (conservative) critic such as Günter Blöcker could still declare the author of this story to be the most talented prose writer of German post-war literature.[13] Among left-wing intellectuals, however, Gaiser was *persona non grata* from the beginning. His books were denounced as irrationalistic and anti-democratic, his renunciation of National Socialism was not thought to be genuine, and his interest in myth, his radical belief that there is a natural and elemental order of existence more fundamental than the man-made orders of society or civilization, was taken as evidence of unregenerate fascist tendencies. In the early 1960s he was attacked by well-known spokesmen for the Left,[14] and a "Gaiser case" was concocted. Gaiser himself, a prime example of the *genus irritabile vatum*, seems to have been deeply affected by the affair, and ostentatiously withdrew to his professional post at an art academy in Reutlingen. He not only refused to argue his case, but gave up writing altogether; he has published nothing since *Am Pass Nascondo* (1960; On the Nascondo Pass). The "case" is indeed significant for the light it throws on the literary life of West Germany during the late 1950s, when the doctrines of the Left became so firmly established that no uncommitted literature dealing with the Nazi past could be tolerated. But of course the purely literary value of Gaiser's work remains untouched by this kind of criticism: *scripta manent*.

III

In the 1960s the theme of Nazism and the German past began to appear in a quite new perspective, because a younger generation of writers was emerging who had known the pre-war period only as children and the war itself as young adolescents. Their position in the great debate was inevitably influenced by the fact that their date of birth entitled them to feel perfectly innocent. Thus, in *Die Blechtrommel* (1959; The Tin Drum) by Günter Grass (b. 1927), the central character decides, on his third birthday, not to grow any more, and to accompany all the doings of the adult world by beating on his toy drum, as an expression of mockery and accusing parody. This grotesque invention provides a most intelligent metaphor for the specific viewpoint of a generation that had still been "little" in "those" days. Grass's use of this device reveals quite remarkable literary gifts, and when the novel first appeared it erupted onto the literary scene with the force of a natural phenomenon that refused to be contained within the customary concepts of literary criticism.

What, then, is the book about? It is the life-story of Oskar Matzerath, told by himself. He is a man of about 30, who has gone to a West German mental hospital for a check-up, and he begins by talking about his family since the generation of his grandparents. He comes from Danzig-Langfuhr, and his grandfather was a Polish pyromaniac, his grandmother a Kaschuban peasant. His father—or rather his official father, for he may have been born of an adulterous relationship between his mother and a Polish cousin—was a Rhineland grocer selling colonial imports, who had somehow or other gone to East German territory. Oskar grew up in a *petit-bourgeois* home, or rather he did not grow up, for (as we have noted) he determined at the age of three to give up growing for the time being and to look at the world with the eyes of a perpetual child. He achieves this in one sense, in that he remains small in stature and enjoys the privileges that this bestows, but his intellectual development is in no way retarded; on the contrary, his mind is particularly precocious, and so also is his disturbingly early sexual energy.

This dwarf has a passion for red and white enamelled tin drums, and over the years he uses up dozens, indeed hundreds of them, battering them to pieces, until finally his drumming becomes a virtuoso performance for which he is highly paid. Oskar also has another gift, which is even less conceivable in realistic terms and which reinforces the tone of grotesque phantasy or Surrealism in the novel: he can break glass by the high pitch of his voice. He shatters the windows of trams and shops, together with beer glasses and the lenses of spectacles (though not church windows, we should note). With the aid of these two talents he manages to make his way in the world during a particularly disturbed and disturbing period of history: he experiences the Nazi regime, the war, the conquest of Danzig by the Red Army, and a few tawdry, chaotic years in post-war Düsseldorf.

One might define *Die Blechtrommel* more or less accurately as an autobiography disguised as a picaresque novel. Under the pseudonym Oskar Matzerath, Grass is telling the story of his own childhood and adolescence, which is closely tied up with the tragedy of his native city of Danzig in the 1930s and 1940s: first poisoned politically by the propaganda of Hitler, then the "incendiary" occasion of World War II, and finally reduced to ruins in the spring of 1945. But the figure of Oskar himself, to whom Grass has given the free use of his own autobiographical material, does not entirely make sense either as a picaresque hero or as the protagonist of a biographical novel. In his relationship to society he is, as the critic Hans Mayer has pointed out, "completely insulated from the outside world, like a monad . . . . He takes bits out of the social scene, but he owes society nothing, behaving towards it more like a pirate than as a politically intelligent animal."[15] Nor does Oskar possess anything like a coherent and developing character of the kind traditionally presented in biographically based fiction. He is a grotesquely shapeless bundle of characteristics and actions, an absurd idiot, a psychologically incomprehensible monster. On one occasion he tries to define his own extraordinariness by saying: "You alone, Oskar, are truly fabulous, you are the beast with the fantastically twisted horn."[16] How, then, are we to understand him, if he is neither a recognizable "character" nor any kind of common mortal? Hans Mayer calls him a *Kunstfigur* (an artefact possessing certain human characteristics).

This *Kunstfigur* has, of course, a certain human likeness, a certain physical presence, but to understand what essentially he is, we have to look at the *Grundgestus* (the basic pattern of his character), as Brecht would have called it—namely, his drumming. Drumming represents for Oskar what the use of language represents for Grass: it is a symbol for the whole of man's capacity for self-expression, the secret of memory, narration, evocation, description, anger, regret, and protest. He can "drum" the complete gamut of his life, varying the mood and emphasis as he likes, but obsessed always with his own particular repertoire of cardinal events: beginning (let us say) with the colourful story of how "poor Mama" was begotten under the skirts of Anna Bronski, the peasant, in a potato field in the autumn, he cuts through the score of his preoccupations to recall other obsessive experiences during the Russian capture of the city, then back again to the "Kaschuban potato fields, October rain over them"—and all this he can vary *ad lib*. His drum can become an instrument of political sabotage, as in the most successful comic episode during the period of the first great propaganda displays of the Hitler movement (it occurs in the chapter appropriately named "The Tribune"). Grass is clearly savouring every detail of his story as he tells how Oskar squatted beneath a political platform and disrupted a national socialist mass demonstration on the Maiwiese in Danzig by his rebellious drumming, which finally forced it to break up. The episode is a splendid *bravura* performance in the best picaresque style. The spirit of insubordination triumphs by its wit and utter independence over the forces of law and order; conformism is undermined by being made fun of; drumming exuberance defeats the dull-witted discipline of the brown-shirt ranks. The final outcome is a general outbreak of anarchistic gaiety, dancing, and wild abandon.

But the drum can also be employed for highly blasphemous activities. There is an episode toward the end of the second book, for instance, where Oskar appears as the spiritual father of a band of nasty young toughs who call him "Jesus." In this guise he organizes a raid on the Herz-Jesu-Kirche (Church of the Sacred Heart), where he had once been baptized: "in vain, perhaps, but unalterably all the same."[17] After some indispensable preparatory work with a saw on the left upper thigh of the Virgin he puts himself in the place of the Son of God, and from there proceeds to celebrate a veritable Black Mass, until he is interrupted by the police.

Less a man than a fantastic bundle of priapic vitality, extreme malice, and satirical wit, Oskar recognizes no taboos, has no notion of even the most elementary obligations of love, and operates outside the pale of human manners. How does he react to the great political scandal of this time? He takes up no firm "position," because he stands for a freedom of unrestricted possibility. On the one hand, he is the little chap with a drum noisily rebelling against the adult world; on the other, he is a true contemporary of Fascism, caught up in the forces that produced its cynical contempt for morality, its godlessness, and its murderous brutality. He exists, politically speaking, outside the society of his time, in a "utopian" sphere where total isolation and detachment are possible, together with total humour and total protest. But he also has real roots in the home of his childhood, where he is three years old—an age when one simply accepts one's world as it is. Whatever historians and political sociologists may say against the German *Kleinbürgertum* (lower middle class) as the breeding ground of Hitlerism—Nazism as the back parlour run berserk—it is from just this background that Oskar gets his view of the world, his sense of home, indeed such selfhood as he has. As a result the book is permeated by a feeling of earthy homeliness; the world in which Fascism could occur is seen through the eyes of a quick-witted urchin who knows his way about in it.

Oskar cannot be regarded as a serious "anti-fascist" character. To play a role of that kind he would have to be a man with a conscience, a political animal, and not the "beast with the fantastically twisted horn," not a unicorn (of which Rilke once said that it was the "no-such" animal). It is as this fantastic creature that Oskar's story symbolizes the imaginative principle, or at least that aspect of the imagination that is politically and morally without responsibility: free to perform whatever fancy may suggest, going as far as it is possible to go, and even beyond that, for phantasy does not stop at the impossible. This total imaginative abandon, however, does not detract from the highly political character of the book or from its extreme moral commitment, but rather reinforces them. It is a mark of Grass's unique achievement in *Die Blechtrommel* that all the non-political licence and artistic freedom he permits himself only serve to strengthen his political argument. Events that are told as wild picaresque adventures reveal at every important turn some basic political intention or else a kind of elementary poetic justice that in the circumstances takes on political significance. This is the case, for instance, with the death of Matzerath senior when Soviet troops force their way into the cellar of the family home. He tries to get rid of his party badge by swallowing it, and after desperate convulsions that look like St Vitus's dance he chokes to death on it (riddled through, for good measure, by a burst of Russian machine-gun fire). Meanwhile Oskar, although he has had a hand in the affair, appears to be quite outside the historical cataclysm, safe behind his child's mask, as he squats on the floor observing an army of ants whose "line of advance passed diagonally across the cellar from the winter potatoes to a sack of sugar."[18] An event in nature and an event in history each offer an ironical reflection of the other. Here Oskar's awareness of what is happening is quite extraordinarily cold and dehumanized; he is playing the part of fate, as it were, in a parody of the ancient Greek figure, grotesquely but fittingly adapted to the circumstances of the 20th century. And the fate of Oskar's father, although it perhaps strikes us as too cruel, is nevertheless appropriate to him; that he should die in this gruesomely comic way, by a banal accident, is in keeping with all the other details of his sordid life.

A similar example of Grass's distinctive technique is found in the story of the Polish Post Office when it is attacked and captured by fascist "home guard" men, and defended by a reckless but doomed group of card-players, among them the invalid caretaker Kobyella (who bleeds to death in a linen basket still clutching his cards in his hand) and the rather nervous, elegantly melancholy Jan Bronski, Oskar's uncle and reputedly also his father, who afterwards gets shot as a partisan. In this incident the combination of bizarre humour and heart-rending sadness is so profoundly evocative that here again, as in "Doctor Faustus's Lament," an elegiac tone is achieved that may be said to be equal to the fearful enormity of the subject.

Grass makes his own sympathies and antipathies felt over Oskar's head, as it were, though always with the help of his universally communicative drumming. Oskar's amoral spirit of adventure may have provided him with the advantage of a narrative standpoint unconstrained by any moral "prejudices," but his sympathies are certainly tied to a moral conception of value. A world in which moral values as such are no longer generally accepted can only rediscover the reason for them by reference to some fundamental purpose or absolute, and for Grass this is to be found in the sphere of political decisions. It often requires unusual perspicacity to realize that an absolute evil may be hidden beneath quite banal appearances.[19] As a child at home, for instance, Oskar comes into contact with the kind of politically corrupt person whose actual criminal energy is not very great: a fatly complacent, "respectable" Nazi who likes his game of cards, and is thought of in the family as "really not so bad after all"—a familiar enough figure at any time. How devastatingly the ugly reality is revealed at last for what it is, when Markus the Jew, who keeps a toyshop, kills himself on the night of 9 November 1938 (*Reichskristallnacht*), quietly and without fuss, as the Nazi storm-troopers break into his shop. The moment of truth has come; there is no disguising any longer what kind of moral choice has to be made. At the end of the chapter, which is called "Faith, Hope, and Charity," Grass adopts Oskar's tone of voice, a child's voice that has never entirely lost its innocence, and says: "There once was a man who sold toys, and his name was Markus, and he took away with him all the toys in the world when he died." No memorial sentence could be more poignant.

In his later books Grass exploited again the theme of his Danzig childhood with all its political implications, and used essentially the same narrative technique that had proved so successful in *Die Blechtrommel*. Both the short novel *Katz und Maus* (1961; Cat and Mouse) and the huge compendium *Hundejahre* (1963; Dog Years) introduce new characters, new plots and situations, together with new excesses of Rabelaisian phantasy and new experiments with language and style. Yet these works, taken as a whole, form a saga in three parts linked by many common features and points of similarity besides their Danzig setting; for instance, the tin-drummer appears briefly in both the later novels (like Alfred Hitchcock in his own films). They have undoubtedly established their author as the leading writer of his generation and the most important novelist in Germany since Thomas Mann. Grass's unconventional trilogy bears comparison with such a celebrated monument of literary achievement as Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder* (1933–43; Joseph and his Brethren), the labour of Hercules in four volumes that was intended, so Thomas Mann himself said at the time, "to take myth away from the fascists."

In the 1960s and 1970s other authors of the same generation as Grass discovered and imitated more or less closely the literary devices of *Die Blechtrommel*, especially its "urchin's-eye view." One sees examples of this in the widely popular novel *Deutschstunde* (1968; The German Lesson) by Siegfried Lenz (b. 1927), and in novels by Walter Kempowski (b. 1929) such as *Tadellöser und Wolff* (1971) and *Uns gehts ja noch gold* (1972; We've

Never Had It So Good), where satirical parody of middle-class speech habits produces some corruscating effects. More recently still, writers of the next generation, born between 1940 and 1945, have shown that they are still far from indifferent to the "German" theme. Peter Handke's *Wunschloses Unglück* (1972; Doomed Apathy), which deals with the unhappy life and final suicide of his mother, is perhaps a fairly representative contribution from this generation, for whom the Nazi period is entirely a matter of history. At the same time it should be remarked that this theme has not prospered at the hands of the most radical school of recent anti-fascists. There had been little room for fruitful literary treatment of the subject wherever interest in the actual historical manifestations of National Socialism has been subordinated to a doctrinaire conception of what Fascism necessarily is and was; then empirical evidence is disregarded, historical thinking rejected as reactionary, and attention aggressively focussed on the "fascist" institutions of so-called formal or bourgeois democracy. For the rest, the process of literary assimilation of the past is not yet over, nor can its end be foreseen. Never before in recorded history has the literary imagination been faced with a task of this kind.

References

1. THOMAS MANN, *Politische Schriften und Reden* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1968), Vol. III, p. 176.
2. See for instance GOTTFRIED BENN, "Doppelleben," *Gesammelte Werke* (Wiesbaden 1961), Vol. IV, pp. 113–72; HANS CAROSSA, *Ungleiche Welten* (Wiesbaden 1951).
3. London, 18 May 1947.
4. MANN, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 167.
5. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 9.
6. *ibid.*, p. 165.
7. See ERICH HELLER, *Thomas Mann: the Ironic German* (London 1959).
8. See KARL JASPERS, *Die Schuldfrage* (Heidelberg 1946).
9. HEINRICH BÖLL, *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (Cologne 1966), pp. 42, 49.
10. Wolfgang Borchert (1921–47) deserves mention here. He returned severely wounded from the war and died at the age of 26. He spoke for a "lost" and "betrayed" generation that had been destroyed by the war. Although artistically immature, his *Draussen vor der Tür* (1947; The Man Outside) is a poignant drama about a returning soldier; together with a handful of Borchert's satirical and realistic short stories, it appealed, and continues to appeal, to a wide public.

11. Artistic ironies of this kind are common in Böll's work. In *Wo warst du Adam?* a bridge is destroyed by the very soldiers who have built it and have defended it with heavy losses; in another passage a soldier gradually draws closer to his home during the last days of the war, only to be killed by one of his "own" shells as he crosses the threshold.
12. GERD GAISER, "Das Rad in Sghemboli," in *Gib acht in Domokosch* (Munich 1951), p. 337.
13. GÜNTER BLÖCKER, *Das kleine Buch der hundert Bücher* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1960), p. 48.
14. WALTER JENS in *Die Zeit* (Hamburg), 25 December 1960; see also M. REICH-RANICKI, *Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost* (Munich 1963), pp. 55 ff.
15. HANS MAYER, *Das Geschehen und das Schweigen* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1969), pp. 38 ff.
16. GÜNTER GRASS, *Die Blechtrommel* (Neuwied and Berlin 1966), p. 452.
17. *ibid.*, p. 158.
18. *ibid.*, p. 471.
19. See HANNAH ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (London 1963), on the "banality of evil."

CHAPTER 13

Russian Literature in the Twentieth Century

Maurice Friedberg*

I

Some people in the audience at the *première* of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in 1903 felt that the sound of the axe in the final scene of the play announced the demise of the cosy nests of Russia's gentlefolk, so lovingly described in scores of Russian novels and poems. Only one year later, in 1904, the death of the play's author marked the end of an era in Russian literature. The two warring giants—Turgenev, the liberal squire, meticulous stylist, and courtly Westerner, and his arch-antagonist Dostoyevsky, an intolerant, choleric chauvinist and impassioned plebeian in whose novels ideas alone are polished and refined—had both died two decades before. True, Tolstoy did not die until 1910, but he had by then almost ceased to exist as a creative writer, and the pilgrims to Yasnaya Polyana bore more resemblance to those headed for Rome than even those who had once flocked to Weimar. By a curious coincidence, the year of Chekhov's death marked also the founding of *Vesy* (Scales), which was to become the leading journal of the Russian Symbolists.

The year 1904 was also the beginning of the end of the Russian Empire. Attacked by the Japanese, the Imperial Russian Navy was decimated in the worst defeat suffered thus far by a European superpower at the hand of what was then only an emerging Asian state. A year later the country was shaken by a revolution. The house of the Romanovs survived for four years after their tricentenary in 1913, but the dynasty was no longer entirely autocratic: following the revolution of 1905 the country received a parliament, albeit one with powers that were limited from the beginning and whittled away even further before the outbreak of World War I. There were, however, for the first time in the country's history, a relatively free press, independent courts, and a lively political life.

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* Professor and Head of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Russian writers were thus freed from an obligation—one that could be viewed either as a burdensome duty or as a unique privilege—to act as the sole spokesmen for their countrymen's political and spiritual hopes and aspirations. As elsewhere in Europe, these were now debated in the Duma, in learned journals, at meetings of political and religio-philosophical societies, and in newspaper editorials. Those writers who were inclined to do so could shy away from politics—a privilege rarely accorded their predecessors by pressures from a highly political literary criticism and from no less ideologically minded readers, and one that would soon be denied their successors by the Union of Soviet Writers—without being exposed to the opprobrium that had threatened the former and the much sterner forms of retribution that were to be faced by the latter.

Many Russian writers were quick to avail themselves of the opportunity; in this, they were encouraged by the emergence of Vekhi (Landmarks), a group of philosophers and historians that included Berdyayev, Sergei Bulgakov, Pyotr Struve, Frank, and Gershenzon. The Vekhi intellectuals, pessimistic about the prospects for a successful revolution, advocated a greater emphasis on retrospection, even as old Tolstoy preached self-perfection and insisted that the "Kingdom of God is within you." Another factor that favoured the tendency of Russian writers to shy away from politics was disillusionment with the effectiveness of literature as an instrument for bringing about social changes. Still another consideration that might have contributed to the process was the changing class composition of the writers themselves: they were no longer predominantly children of the landed gentry, whose feelings of social guilt had frequently propelled them to social action in the previous century. Be that as it may, it seems reasonable to assume that it was this depoliticalization of literature, and not the exhaustion of the potentials of a literary genre, that was primarily responsible for the drastic decline in popularity of the novel in Russian writing on the eve of World War I. In the preceding decades, Russian novels had more often than not been highly didactic *Bildungsromanen* and *romans à thèse*, vehicles for populist and socialist thought. True, they were to resume their accustomed roles in the 1920s. The interim period, however, offered a welcome respite and an opportunity for the other, shorter prose genres and, above all, poetry to assert themselves. The brevity of the first freed their authors from the obligation to develop full-drawn "positive heroes," ideological conflicts, and instructive denouements. As for verse, it was more appropriate for the probing of feelings and thus even more exempt from being a carrier of ideology (although peotry of social protest did exist in the previous century and was associated with the name of at least one famous poet, Nikolai Nekrasov); the recalcitrant poet could always defend himself from those who demanded "ideology" by appealing to the authority of Pushkin, who had decreed long ago that "poetry should—and may the Lord forgive me—be somewhat on the stupid side." Curiously, not too dissimilar conditions were to affect the relative popularity of the various literary genres in the years that followed. The massive, tediously didactic novels that won so many Stalin prizes in the oppressive 1930s and in the post-war years were all but officially suspended during World War II, a period marked by a significant relaxation of ideological controls, and again at the time of the post-Stalin "thaws." During both intervals, they were displaced by the short story and (to an even greater extent) by poetry, the latter often set to music.

II

The years between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 constitute one of the few periods in the history of Russian letters when the Russian reader could look to his literature not only for inspiration and guidance but for pure entertainment as well. (Traditionally, this function had been carried out by translations of Western authors; the situation was to revert to *status quo ante* less than two decades after the Bolshevik *coup d'état.*) Thus, the literature in which virtually all writers had previously aspired to high seriousness (although the majority, needless to say, succeeded only in imbuing their work with magisterial didacticism), and in which the only comic genre tolerated by the civic-minded critics had been satire (and preferably social satire at that), began, at long last, to produce humorists. High standards had been set in the years immediately preceding by the early short stories and one-act plays of Chekhov (though it is noteworthy that even Chekhov had ultimately succumbed to the advice of the traditionally didactic novelist Dmitri Grigorovich to turn to *real*, meaning "serious," literature, but with brilliant results) and much excellent apolitical humour—light, relaxing reading—began to appear in a number of periodicals, most notably in *Satirikon*. The foremost humorists of pre-Soviet Russia were Teffi (pseudonym of Nadezhda Buchinskaya) and Arkadi Averchenko. Both of them emigrated after the advent of the Soviet regime, as if foreseeing the lamentable future of their genre: comic writing survived in the Soviet Union only during the permissive 1920s. The finest Soviet humorist of that period, Mikhail Zoshchenko, was ultimately silenced for the sin of producing "senseless, un-ideological laughter" (indeed, in 1946 Zoshchenko was formally expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers), and the works of Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940), the most sophisticated Soviet satirist to date, remained virtually banned until the 1960s: even then, some (such as *The Master and Margarita*) were mutilated by censorship, and others (e.g. *The Heart of a Dog*), though published in the West, remain inaccessible in the Soviet Union. It would be hardly an exaggeration to say that since the demise in the late 1930s of the team of Il'ya Il'f and Evgeni Petrov—the authors of *The Twelve Chairs* (1928) and its sequel *The Golden Calf* (1931)—comic writing has all but disappeared in the Soviet Union.

Until the end of the 19th century Russian literature treated sex in a very reticent, almost bashful manner, even if viewed against the background of western European writing of the period (again, there was to be a retrogression to this standard in the early 1930s). Sexuality had been treated as sin, or lust, or defiance of society in some of the great Russian novels, such as *Anna Karenina* or *The Brothers Karamazov*; but even these emphasized love rather than desire, and it was a Russian novelist who created the most memorable "virginal" prostitute in fiction, Sonya Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*. Other authors had been even more cautious in their portrayal of love: the novels of Turgenev are a case in point. There was very little exploitation of sex catering to the reader's prurient interest. Indeed, there was hardly any banal literature in which sex was depicted in a flippant, amusing manner. Not that there was no interest in this type of fare among the reading public; but, once again, the demand was met by translations. Russian theatres performed scores of bedroom farces to sell-out audiences, but almost all the plays were imports, predominantly French.

This situation underwent significant change during 1904–17. As if reacting to the decades of restrictions, some Russian writers began to manufacture reading matter that was then declared shocking pornography, although today, of course, it would be considered in the West merely laboured and sentimental pulp fiction. The chief purveyor of this merchandise was Mikhail Artsybashev, who achieved notoriety as the author of *Sanin* (1907), which advocated free love. Another best-selling novel was *The Wrath of Dionysus* (1910), in which a similar message appeared even more scandalous because it was advanced by a woman author, Evdokiya Nagrodskaya. A high degree of popularity was also enjoyed by translations of the rather melodramatic portrayals of lust in the works of Stanislaw Przybyszewski, a Polish novelist who, by virtue of residence in what was then part of the Russian Empire, was treated as a Russian rather than foreign author. Finally, there was Aleksandr Kuprin's *Yama the Pit* (1909–15), a semi-documentary sentimental novel depicting an Odessa brothel inhabited by a melancholy collection of fallen women.

Kuprin has also acquired renown as the author of scores of swiftly moving short stories populated with thieves, circus magicians, and sailors set in appropriately exotic surroundings, and of the anti-militaristic novel *The Duel* (1905). Similar short stories, telling of tramps, gipsies, and pedlars, and written in a romantic-sentimental vein, brought renown to Maksim Gor'ky. Melodrama and suspense were to be found in the tales of Leonid Andreyev, whose style, however, differed from Gor'ky's and Kuprin's traditional realism by its often laboured attempts at copying the "modernistic" devices of fashionable serious fiction. Serious readers found Andreyev irritating, and Tolstoy remarked on one occasion, "Andreyev wants to frighten me, but I am not scared." Less demanding readers, however, found him both fascinating and extremely daring.

Such was the reading fare of the uneducated audience on the eve of World War I. The same period, however, saw the appearance of some of the most sophisticated and refined writing in the history of Russian literature, which was to earn it the name of the "Silver Age," second in brilliance only to the age of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol'. As mentioned, it was primarily an age of poetry, which facilitated the revolt against the tenets of traditional realism, with its didacticism and all-but-obligatory preoccupation with civic themes. With only a few exceptions, which will be mentioned later, the poets belonged to the symbolist camp, a movement that made its first appearance in Russia in the last decade of the 19th century and that was profoundly influenced by Verlaine and Baudelaire.

In almost every respect the Symbolists were the antithesis of their predecessors. They eschewed clarity in favour of allusions, often highly ambiguous and obscure. Examination of the minutiae of the social fabric was replaced by an intense, often narcissistic preoccupation with self. The themes of sex and death, hitherto used as illustrations of man's moral predicament, were elevated to an autonomous status: many of the Symbolists displayed a morbid enchantment with perverse eroticism, from homosexuality to incest and necrophilia. Concern for ethical categories was replaced by a demonstratively amoral stance, although this did not impede many of the Symbolists from becoming intensely preoccupied with religion. To Symbolists, beauty was more important than justice, and the morally tinged problem of suffering was pushed aside to make room for an abstractly aesthetic contemplation of morally neutral horrors and fears; their spirit was Greek, not Hebrew. Finally, they favoured a deliberate blurring of the lines separating the present from the past and from the future, the immediate from the distant, reality from illusion.

Not all the Symbolists were "highbrow" writers. Some were sufficiently shallow to reach easily the millions of less discriminating readers who found their works novel and titillating. Besides Andreyev, this group included the pseudo-profound historical novelist Dmitri Merezhkovsky and his wife, the poetess Zinaida Gippius (paradoxically, both were discerning literary critics and their erudite and elegant essays were usually thoughtful and provocative), as well as the poet Konstantin Balmont (1867–1943). The latter was considered by many to be the most notorious of the "decadents" (ironically, this label, originally invented by the Symbolists' enemies, the conventional "bourgeois" writers of the last century, is still in use in Soviet criticism). Balmont's enormous popularity with the reading public was due partly to the striking poetic effects employed in his verse (such as alliteration and onomatopoeia), but at least in equal measure to the exotic settings of many of his poems. He portrayed distant lands, the vastness of the sea, the brilliance of the sun, and employed all these as rather facile symbols for the impulses governing the behaviour of man. As was the case with many of Russia's poets of the period, Balmont was attracted by Nietzsche's idea of the Superman. His themes and thought are reminiscent of those of Nikolai Gumilyov (1886–1921), a poet of considerably higher stature and belonging to a different school (Gumilyov was an Acmeist), whose verse dealt with African warriors and Spanish conquistadors, martial virtues and adventure.

The foremost symbolist poets of Russia were Valeri Bryusov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, and Aleksandr Blok. Bryusov (1873–1924) was one of the founders of Russian Symbolism, and his verse embodies some of its most characteristically paradoxical features. Strongly erotic, it nevertheless retains a cold, rational detachment that imparts a somewhat artificially theoretical flavour to its imagery: the sexuality of Bryusov's verse is most convincing when presented as a purposeful "serious" activity, such as a religious ritual. Steeped in the lore of ancient Greece as well as that of the Orient, it simultaneously glorifies the modern city. Highly intellectual, it exults in the advent of the modern Huns and Scythians who will, he hopes, purify Western civilization of its corruption, but also quite possibly destroy all civilization in the process (a similar "death-wish" motif is reflected in two of Blok's most famous poems). Finally, it was Bryusov who denounced most vigorously the idea of the artist's social responsibility—which, however, did not prevent Bryusov from joining the Communist Party (needless to say, the party would hardly approve of such views), and even from serving for a time as head of the Soviet censorship. Although best known as a poet (and a literary scholar of considerable distinction), Bryusov is also the author of some excellent prose, including *The Fiery Angel* (1907), which deals with witchcraft in Germany during the period of Luther's religious rebellion, and numerous short stories, including the anti-utopian novella, *The Republic of the Southern Cross* (1918), in which a totalitarian state faces annihilation from a mysterious plague.

Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), a professor of classics, wrote highly erudite, polished, ornate, solemn verse and, in his famous *Correspondence from Two Corners* (1921), attempted to convince the historian Mikhail Gershenzon of the importance of cultural continuity even in conditions of revolutionary upheaval. Not unexpectedly, Ivanov drew even more heavily on Greek and Latin sources. His St Petersburg apartment, known as "The Tower," was the place where the Symbolists discussed the fine points of their doctrine, with Ivanov solemnly presiding over the proceedings.

The greatest of the symbolist poets, Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), grew up among some of Russia's most cultivated men and women. His father was a university professor in Warsaw, and he himself was to marry the daughter of the great chemist Mendeleev. Blok's extreme sensitivity, his rapidly changing moods alternating between ebullient enthusiasm and bleak despair, might have been a boon to Russian poetry, but they also resulted in his untimely death at the age of 40 from a disease that was aptly diagnosed by the poet Vladislav Khodasevich as an "insomnia of the heart."

What was often laboured in his fellow-Symbolists was always natural and graceful in Blok. There is never a trace of contrivance, of artifice, or of bookishness, even though his poetry is not always simple. He was a follower of the liberal religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, but succeeded in reflecting in poetic form the spirit of his teachings, rather than merely conveying their content in verse, as did some of Blok's less gifted contemporaries. Two themes fascinated Blok: the illusory nature of beauty, and the impending doom of Western civilization. In Blok's early verse we find the poet spellbound by Sophia, who appears in many guises as the Beautiful Lady, or the female incarnation of Divine Wisdom, or the embodiment of youth. Sophia's image is simultaneously transcendental and earthly-passionate; not infrequently, the sensuality of Blok's imagery and the musical quality of his verse bear a strong imprint of the gipsy cabaret. And then, as in the cabaret, the spell breaks and vulgar reality asserts its rights. The strange and alluring Beautiful Lady turns into an ordinary prostitute, and the only way to escape cruel truth and to retain beautiful illusion is to drown oneself in wine. This is the ironic meaning of the exclamation *in vino veritas!* in "The Unknown Lady" (1906), one of Blok's most famous poems, in which the original beautiful vision appears regularly "in the evenings, over restaurants." A year later, in 1907, Blok was to heap sarcasm upon his early illusions in the play *The Puppet Show.*

The Symbolists were, in essence, neo-Romantics and as such tended not only to rebel against established civilization but also to glorify the savage who, to them, could not but be noble. Historically, in a Russian context, this invariably led to a "Slavophile" position, namely one that not merely insisted on the uniqueness of Russia's historical experience and destiny, but tried to reverse the process, begun by Peter the Great, to divorce Russia from Europe and to link her with Asia. On the other hand, in the context of a revolutionary situation, it led to an espousal of the revolutionary cause. This was inspired, perhaps, not so much by the promise of the revolution, as by a fascination with its violence, which was viewed both as a scourge of God and as a purifying fire.

The twin motifs were reflected in Blok's two most famous poems, "The Scythians" and "The Twelve," both written in 1918. The first identifies the Russians as slant-eyed Asiatics who may either be appeased by Europe or become her conquerors. The latter, the most discussed and the most enigmatic single Russian poem of the 20th century, portrays 12 drunken soldiers, cursing and shooting, marching in a blizzard; at the end, Christ appears and leads the procession.

A similar poem, entitled "Christ Is Risen," was written in the same year by another Symbolist, Andrei Bely (pseudonym of Boris Bugayev). Although a talented poet and a highly original—though controversial—critic and literary theoretician, Bely (1880–1934) made his most notable contributions in the realm of prose. His two most important works are the novels *The Silver Dove* (1910) and *Petersburg* (1913). The first is a neo-Romantic variation on the theme of a civilized man's adventures with a primitive tribe, which in Russian literature appeared (among others) in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (1840) and in Tolstoy's *The Cossacks* (1863). In *The Silver Dove* Bely's hero, a refined and highly educated poet, is dissatisfied with civilized existence and joins a religious sect of peasants professing an orgiastic cult. Ultimately he becomes disillusioned, but there is to be no return. The peasants, fearful that he may denounce them to the authorities, kill him. *Petersburg* continues the tradition of Pushkin, Gogol', and Dostoyevsky, who described the Russian capital, built in the 18th century by Peter the Great, as an artificial, unreal growth on the body of Russia. To Bely, St Petersburg personifies the grotesque marriage of Europe and Asia, a union that cannot possibly endure. The central personage is Ableukhov, a high government official of Tatar ancestry bearing the quintessentially Western "civilized" name of Apollon. The official, who represents Imperial Russia, cherishes the antiseptic orderliness and rigid symmetry of the modern European capital (Russia, it should be remembered, also had a second, "Asiatic" capital, Moscow) but, quite literally (in company with the other Symbolists, Bely was not immune to occasional lapses into cheap melodrama), carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction. It is the official's son who is entrusted by the revolutionaries with the task of executing Apollon Ableukhov. It appears, however, that the indecisiveness and weakness of the conservative father have been transmitted to the revolutionary son: the assassination is never carried out.

The best Russian symbolist novel is *The Petty Demon* (1905) by Fyodor Sologub (pseudonym of Fyodor Teternikov). As if echoing an observation made in one of Dostoyevsky's novels, Sologub's book strips evil of the aura of grandeur that so often surrounds it in literature and proceeds to portray an evil that is banal, vulgar, and stupid. The novel's central character is a stuffy and tyrannical provincial schoolteacher, obsessed with a persecution mania and surrounded, for the most part, by equally repulsive men and women. Like other works by Sologub, *The Petty Demon* is permeated with sexuality in its many guises—overt and covert, natural and perverse—as well as with satanism. The subtle irony of the novel lies in the fact that the intuition of its mentally deranged protagonist proves more reliable than the reasoned opinions of the novel's sane characters, as well as those of its presumably rational readers. A prepubescent boy, whom the schoolteacher has preposterously accused at the beginning of the novel of being a girl, turns out to be attracted by transvestite games, and a girl whose innocence he has callously questioned turns out to be less than pure. The murder with which the novel ends compounds the atmosphere of grotesque horror.

The charges that were most often levelled at the Symbolists by their opponents were excessive preoccupation with religious mysticism and metaphysics, lack of clarity, aloofness from the social problems of the day, and a tendency to create "effeminate art." The two movements that represented a revolt against Symbolism were Acmeism and Futurism, both founded in 1912. The Acmeists preferred concrete imagery, a masculine tone, and an optimistic attitude to life. Their chief exponents were Nikolai Gumilyov (1886–1921), a highly gifted if somewhat uneven poet referred to earlier; Anna Akhmatova (1889–1967), indubitably the finest woman poet in 20th-century Russian literature; and the exceptionally urbane and intellectual Osip Mandel'shtam (1891–1938), a brilliantly polished craftsman, the author of some of the most sensitive verse in the Russian language. In spite of their anti-mystical bent, love for the material, and admiration of man's creativity, the Acmeists fared badly under the Soviet regime. Gumilyov was shot in 1921 for his alleged participation in an anti-Soviet conspiracy; Akhmatova, who continued to write until her death in 1967, was denounced in 1946 for the ideological sins of her verse, and expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers; and Mandel'shtam died in 1938 in a Soviet concentration camp.

A more extreme reaction against Symbolism was that of the Futurists. Their opening salvo, the manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," went much further than the programme advocated by the Acmeists. They advocated "throwing Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy overboard from the ship of modernity." They also called for scrapping the old, worn-out language of the past, and insisted that the poetic lexicon be enriched with neologisms, not necessarily comprehensible ones, because, they claimed, words that are semantically meaningless (such as the incantations of Siberian *shamans*, exclamations, children's nonsense verse) are often the ones that have the greatest emotional impact on the audience. Exponents of spoken rather than written poetry (written poetry was to them only a recording, no more valuable in itself than a musical score), they abandoned the traditional syllabo-tonic metre of Russian verse and reverted to the purely accentual verse of Russian folklore. This was, however, the Futurists' sole point of contact with folklore: their brashly masculine verse scoffed at the pastoral imagery of nightingales, flowers, and birch trees and extolled the magnificence of the industrial city. The two great poets of Russian Futurism were Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922), who created the concept of "trans-sensory language" (his best-known effort was "Incantation with Laughter," a poem consisting chiefly of improvised derivatives—adjectives, adverbs, verbs—of the Russian root *smekh*, laughter), and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), who characteristically remained coldly indifferent to the resplendent mountains of his native Caucasus but was moved to ecstasy by the sight of Brooklyn Bridge.

Mayakovsky was a highly contradictory figure, both as a man and as a poet. A communist, a highly political poet, a professed believer in utilitarian verse ("I want Stalin to report to the Politbureau on the work of poetry"), and the author of much undisguised propaganda and plain advertising copy (he wrote the texts for political posters, and also stanzas urging people to smoke Soviet cigarettes and to buy only a specific brand of pacifiers for their infants), he was to rebel in later years against party-imposed regimentation of literature. Side by side with caustic gibes at traditional erotic verse, Mayakovsky also wrote some very moving love lyrics. A fighter for the communist millennium, he wrote two plays in which he expressed serious apprehension over the kind of man Communism may produce, fearing that he may turn out to be either a petty bureaucratic tyrant (such as Pobedonosikov in his play *The Bath-house*, 1929), or perhaps more ominously, a sterilized automaton emasculated of all "superfluous" human feelings, a creature who would make an old-time vodka-drinking, guitar-strumming idler look attractive by comparison (*The Bedbug*, 1928). A poet of undisputed genius, Mayakovsky had the public image of a hardened tribune of the revolution. It was Mayakovsky who reproached a fellow-poet, the peasant bard Sergei Yesenin, for having committed suicide in 1925; to Mayakovsky, this was reprehensible weakness, an unwillingness to come to grips with life. But five years later, in 1930, Mayakovsky followed in Yesenin's footsteps.

The predominance of poetry during World War I and in the first years of the Soviet regime was due in no small measure to the vagaries of wartime tsarist and then Soviet censorship, paper shortages, disrupted communications, and general chaos. It was difficult in such conditions to print books, much less to sell them. Poetry was recited in cafés (some of which, such as "The Stray Dog," deserve mention in any history of Russian poetry) and at public meetings. This left an imprint on the quality of Russian verse of the period: suitability for public recitation came to be highly prized, and the theatrical talents of individual poets acquired an importance rivalling that of the artistic merits of their works. It also encouraged a proliferation of poetic schools and often embittered literary polemics. But in retrospect the benefits of the "oral" period of Russian poetry far outweigh the limitations it imposed on Russian writers. (Once again, the phenomenon was to be repeated—on a more modest scale and under vastly different conditions—after Stalin's death.)

A noteworthy feature of all the modernist trends in Russian literature was the desire to abolish what were considered artificial barriers that had traditionally separated the various means of artistic expression. At no other time in Russia's cultural history was there a comparably close co-operation between painters and poets, composers and dramatists, dancers and novelists, and, curiously, between creative writers and critics and philologists. Thus, the futurist manifesto had the painter David Burlyuk among its signatories, and Mayakovsky himself was a gifted graphic artist. The poet and novelist Andrei Bely wrote prose works that he called "symphonies," and that were indeed structured on principles normally associated with music. Visual and musical effects played an important part in the theatre of the period, and young linguists and literary scholars, such as Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, helped to shape the new literature by providing it with a theoretical framework.

While the modernists, as the Symbolists and their acmeist and futurist allies were collectively called, dominated the literary scene, some major writers continued to create in the traditional vein. Several of them were centred upon the Znanie (Knowledge) publishing house. Of these, the most important were Maksim Gor'ky (1868–1936) and Ivan Bunin (1870–1953).

At the turn of the century, Gor'ky (pseudonym of Aleksei Peshkov) was by far the most popular writer in Russia. His somewhat sentimental short stories of people on the peripheries of society—staid merchants fallen on hard times, tramps, occasional labourers—were the more avidly read because most of them were at least partly autobiographical: Gor'ky was one of the very few Russian writers with almost no formal education but with an extremely colourful life history. Yet, in retrospect, he appears destined to be chiefly remembered for *The Lower Depths* (1902), a powerful naturalistic play set in a dosshouse inhabited by assorted derelicts; for the endearingly simple *Childhood* (1913–4; the other two volumes of the autobiography, clearly modelled on Tolstoy's, are decidedly inferior); and for *Mother* (1907), a rather poorly written novel about the transformation of an illiterate old woman into a revolutionary sympathizer. The last book is important because it is so often invoked as the original socialist realist novel. Gor'ky's output was vast, but most of it is marred by sententiousness, repetitiveness, and the all-too-obvious desire to create a panoramic view of Russian society on the eve of the revolution; the result was a series of ambitious, but flabby and humourless, novels. There is no doubt, however, but that Gor'ky's services to Russian culture far transcend his writings. Taking advantage of his friendship with many of the communist leaders (whom he had effectively and generously supported before 1917), and notwithstanding the displeasure he often invoked, Gor'ky interceded time and again on behalf of scores of imprisoned or starving Russian writers and artists, and also helped to prevent the destruction of numerous libraries, museums, and so on. It would hardly be an overstatement to claim that, to a large extent, it was Gor'ky personally who provided a link between the culture of pre-revolutionary Russia and that of the Soviet Union, and that his fame before 1917 and the veneration accorded him (he was called "the Pope of Russian literature") symbolize this fact.

Whereas Gor'ky bridged the two ideologically diverse streams of Russian literature, Ivan Bunin served as a link with its new branch that came into being after the revolution, namely *émigré* literature. The *émigrés* included a number of writers who ultimately returned to the Soviet Union, unable to live and create far from their country and their readers. This group included Aleksei N. Tolstoy, author of the nostalgically autobiographical *Nikita's Childhood* (1921) and other novels: the prolific Il'ya Erenburg; the lyric poetess Marina Tsvetayeva; the short-story writer Kuprin; and Gor'ky himself. Those who left never to return included most of the Symbolists—Vyacheslav Ivanov, Balmont, Severyanin, Merezhkovsky, Gippius—as well as the historical novelist Mark Aldanov, the traditional realist Ivan Shmelyov, the whimsically "ornamental" writer Aleksei Remizov, the humorist Teffi, and a score of others. Not only did these writers continue to create abroad—in Paris and Prague, Rome and New York, Berlin and Shanghai—but some new names were added to their ranks. A number of these—such as Boris Poplavsky and Vladislav Khodasevich—are now undeservedly forgotten: their works remain physically inaccessible to Soviet readers, and are linguistically beyond the reach of the assimilated children of the original *émigrés*. Others changed their medium, in at least one case with meteoric success: the young *émigré* Russian novelist Vladimir Sirin became the American Vladimir Nabokov.

Ivan Bunin was an established poet and prose writer well before the revolution. In many respects, he was the antithesis of everything that Gor'ky stood for. Gor'ky may be considered the first proletarian writer, Bunin the last writer of the Russian gentry. An elegant Classicist in poetry, given to understatement, he shunned sentimentality; in fact, one may even discern in him a streak of cynicism. At a time when most of the poets experimented with a variety of new techniques, Bunin continued to create as if the Symbolists did not exist, and he had nothing but contempt for the literary "hooligans." He also seemed to be out of step with his contemporaries in his choice of themes. When most Russian writers had shifted to urban themes, Bunin wrote *The Village* (1909–10) and *Dry Valley* (1911). To make matters worse, he did not portray the peasants in a sympathetic light, as kind, noble, but unjustly oppressed people, as was then all but obligatory in liberal-reformist literary circles. Instead, the former work was a frightening picture of dehumanized peasants, reminiscent of Zola's *La terre*, and the latter was a portrait of the degeneration of the Russian landed gentry. Some of Bunin's prose and verse is set abroad. This category includes his most famous work, the novella "The Gentleman from San Francisco" (1915), a bitterly ironical indictment of the sham and anonymity of modern civilization, where nothing, not even death, can destroy the mask of propriety that serves to conceal its unattractive countenance. A number of Bunin's most important works, including *The Well of Days* (first volume of *The Life of Arseniev*)—for which he received a Nobel Prize—and *The Yelagin Affair* (both published in 1927), were written abroad. It is paradoxical that the *émigré* Bunin is now cherished in the Soviet Union for the purity and richness of his Russian, qualities in which he has no peer among Soviet writers who never left their native land.

III

Politically, militarily, and—to a lesser extent—economically, the communist take-over on 7 November 1917 marked the end of one epoch and the beginning of another; but it was not so in literature. For a number of years before 1917, "revolutionary" literature had been appearing in Imperial Russia, and traditional non-political literature continued to appear after the November *coup d'état*, much of it written by authors who had been active in literary life before the Bolsheviks came to power. Provided their works were not openly anti-Soviet, they could appear in print through one of the dozens of privately owned publishing houses that continued to exist for over a decade. Some were even printed by *émigré* publishers established in western Europe, primarily to protect the Soviet authors from literary piracy: until 1973 Soviet Russia was not a signatory of any international agreement on copyright. To see to it that no anti-regime literature appeared in books or periodicals a central censorship agency was established only three days after the birth of the Soviet republic, and given power to prevent the publication of any politically or otherwise undesirable literary material. The decree on the establishment of the agency (known as Glavlit) emphasized the temporary nature of the measure, and promised its abolition as soon as calm was restored in the country, then torn by civil war. Never was there a more apt illustration of the old French saying *rien ne dure que le provisoire*: more than half a century after its "temporary" establishment, Glavlit shows no sign of disappearing. In fact, as was pointed out in 1967 in an open letter to the Soviet Writers' Congress by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and again in 1968 by Grigori Svirsky, Glavlit is as active and as arbitrary in its actions as ever before.

Indeed, the early post-revolutionary years were marked by a high degree of permissiveness in literary life. True, there were the proponents of proletarian culture and its offshoots, the Smithy group, who demanded a militantly political literature. The Futurists, who in Italy were soon to become faithful servants of Mussolini's Fascism, unsuccessfully clamoured in Russia for the role of official poets of Communism. There is no doubt, however, but that the most influential group of writers were the Serapion Brothers (so named after a work by E. T. A. Hoffman), who proudly declared the absence of any unifying ideology to be their one common bond. The Serapions included the humorist Mikhail Zoshchenko, whose tragi-comic stories of common folk trying to adapt themselves to the grandiloquent political state provided millions of Russians with a catharsis born of empathy—if not, indeed, outright identification—with his hapless heroes and absurd situations. Another member of the group was Konstantin Fedin, whose staid and rather tediously didactic novels of the revolution as viewed from Russia and from Germany facilitated his subsequent conversion to Stalinist Socialist Realism. The latitude allowed members of the group is borne out by the fact that Fedin's colleague was Evgeni Zamyatin (1884–1937), an innovator in style and a hater of all conformism be it traditional bourgeois (as depicted in his novel *The Islanders* [1922], a lampoon of British respectability) or of a totalitarian-egalitarian variety (his anti-utopian novel *We*, which was published abroad in 1924 and eventually forced him to leave the Soviet Union, antedated similar works by Orwell and Huxley). Primitive violence of the revolution and the civil war was portrayed in Nikolai Nikitin's *Fort Vomit* (1922) and Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14–69* (1922). These two works gain in effectiveness from the detached, matter-of-fact manner in which they relate the most horrifying details of man's cruelty to man in the name of a future human brotherhood.

Other writers belonged to any one of a number of smaller literary groups, or to none. Two poets, Nikolai Klyuyev and Sergei Yesenin, mourned the impending demise of the traditional Russian village in a

Soviet state that dreamed of industrialization and that openly proclaimed that the peasants were less than the equals of industrial workers. Yesenin's rowdy, sentimental verse was denounced merely as "hooligan," but Klyuyev was charged with being a class enemy, an agent of the *kulaks* (then being deported *en masse* to Siberia), and his fate was that of a *kulak*: he died in the late 1930s in a concentration camp.

Not surprisingly, Soviet literature of the 1920s dealt mainly with the horror and violence of the revolutionary upheaval. The convulsions of the struggle could be viewed in many ways: as the dawn of a better world or as a scourge of God; as a giant step forward in the evolution of humanity or as a monstrous retrogression into the Dark Ages; as a rationally conceived battle or as an accident of history, however cataclysmic. In essence, the different visions of the revolution fitted into the two traditional Russian categories, the Slavophile and the Westernizer. Their most characteristic representatives were also the two most eminent prose writers of the period, Boris Pil'nyak (1894–1938) and Isaak Babel' (1894–1941).

Pil'nyak (pseudonym of Boris Vogau), a descendant of German settlers on the Volga and of an old family of Russian merchants of partly Tatar ancestry, spent his childhood in the ancient towns of northern and eastern Russia, places hardly touched by the European influences that began to penetrate the country in the 18th century. To Pil'nyak the revolution was a welcome slavophile reaction to the veneer of Western customs arbitrarily imposed on Russia by Peter the Great, and in his *Mahogany* (1929) he speaks of a town that he calls "Russian Bruges and Russia's Kamakura." Russia, to Pil'nyak, is part of the Orient; the revolution is but a peasant rebellion against the city; the rebels are barbarians who destroy that which was built by civilization, but the civilization is an alien one, and the Oriental hordes are merely asserting their tribal rights, as did their predecessors whose horses were let out to graze on the ruins of imperial Rome. Pil'nyak's *The Naked Year* (1922) portrays degenerate gentry, but their disease is not that of a doomed social class within an ethnically homogeneous society, but rather of doomed European masters among Asiatic aborigines. In the same novel, significantly, one of the chief characters carries with him a dictionary of foreign loan-words in Russian—obviously alien elements destined to be eliminated; the peasants, who hate all foreign "isms," including Communism, heartily approve of their native Bolsheviks. The impression of chaos in Pil'nyak's novels is heightened by his language, an amalgam of folksy Russian archaic expressions, journalese, Communist Party lingo, and Western borrowings. Pil'nyak's anarchic leanings and his fascination with the revolution as an elemental destructive force had little in common with the official programme of the Soviet state, just as his ascetic communist hermits in the catacombs of *Mahogany* bore no resemblance to the new Soviet elite: in fact, they seemed to bear out Trotsky's charges of the betrayal and bureaucratization of the revolution. Pil'nyak was arrested during the purges and died in prison. Unlike many victims of Stalin's terror, he was never fully "rehabilitated" and his works are still largely banned in the Soviet Union.

Isaak Babel' was in many respects the antithesis of Pil'nyak. An Odessa Jew, he grew up in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Russia's busiest commercial port in a slum that produced Hebrew poets and famed musicians. Babel' was a "Western" writer both as a Jew and as a product of French rather than Russian culture: his literary masters were Flaubert and Maupassant. An extremely meticulous author, he wrote comparatively little: his fame rests chiefly on two collections of short stories, *The Red Cavalry* (1926) and *Odessa Tales* (1927). Like many of his contemporaries, Babel' was also spellbound by the fury of the revolution, but although he was haunted by the nightmare of seemingly senseless violence, his tales achieve a high degree of emotional detachment. Although they are narrated by a motley assortment of characters—communist Cossack horsemen, a Bolshevik commissar, traditional Jews from the old Pale of Settlement—most of the tales share a sense of irony that removes them from the genre of stories of uncomplicated heroism favoured by so many Russian authors of his day. Try as he may, in these tales, the narrator—to a large extent Babel' himself—cannot learn to murder with impunity. He must pay for it with a profound feeling of guilt. The moral dilemma is poignantly demonstrated in the short story "Gedali," in which the protagonist, a religious old Jew, is puzzled because murder and looting accompany the successive occupations of his town by the Whites and then by the Reds: how then, he asks, is one to tell which is the revolution and which the counter-revolution? And even more important, the old man—and, it seems, Babel' as well—is troubled because the revolution demands that *all* the old values, the good as well as the bad, be discarded: "To the Revolution we say 'yes,' but can we say 'no' to the Sabbath?" Babel's scepticism, his refusal to exchange an unquestioning religious orthodoxy for an equally simple political faith, and his reluctance to concede that the vision of a communist future justifies any means to attain it, all contributed to his ostracism and subsequent arrest. He died in 1941 in a Soviet concentration camp.

No such qualms appear to have troubled Aleksandr Fadeyev (1901–56), whose novel *The Rout* (1927), the story of a communist guerrilla detachment in the Far East, was to become an officially sponsored classic whose unquestioning Bolshevik hero was presented to millions as a model for emulation. A good "Tolstoyan" novel employing some devices of psychological and ethical analysis reminiscent of *War and Peace*, *The Rout* remains an outstanding example of a successful blending of art with ideological purity. In later years Fadeyev became a literary bureaucrat; he was for a long time head of the Union of Soviet Writers. (Following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes in 1956, however, Fadeyev committed suicide.) Another author seemingly immune to the moral conflicts that assailed Babel' was Dmitri Furmanov (1891–1926). His novel *Chapayev* (1923)—a popular classic, though inferior to *The Rout*—shows how the elemental revolutionary energy of a peasant leader is harnessed and given direction by a Bolshevik commissar.

Most of the predicaments explored by Russian writers in the 1920s were peculiar to a Soviet society. Some, however, were those that the Soviet Union shared with other countries undergoing industrialization. One slogan of that period declared Socialism to be nothing more than a Soviet system of government plus electrification; another urged the populace to help catch up with, and then to overtake, America. A writer who examined the threat to old human values posed by the industrial age (rather than specifically by the Soviet political system) and whose work was thus immediately relevant to people far beyond the Soviet borders was Yuri Olesha (1889–1960), the author of the novel *Envy* (1927) and a few shorter works. Upon its appearance *Envy* had the rare distinction of evoking praise from Soviet and *émigré* critics alike, although later the novel's message—that there may indeed be a conflict between machines and human feelings—caused it to be suppressed for some 30 years. In Olesha's wise and skilfully constructed novel a Soviet Babbitt (the parallel is almost irresistible, and probably intended by Olesha himself: the character's name is Babichev) is a well-intentioned man: his goal is to free women from the yoke of housekeeping. He proposes to accomplish this by instituting a system of public feeding, where cheap, nourishing meals would be available to all. In the meantime, he is busy perfecting a new brand of sausage (it should be noted that in Russian the term *kolbasnik*, sausage maker, is synonymous with smugness and vulgarity). But sausage is not Babichev's only passion: he is also the protector of a healthy young soccer player and his athletic female companion. If the suggestion of Babichev's homosexuality and sterility is muted, his lack of interest in anything spiritual is not. He cannot understand why two poets—one of them his own brother—who are cleverly portrayed by Olesha as spiteful, petty, envious men, hate and despise him. Neither Babichev nor the two poets, Olesha seems to suggest, offer a panacea to mankind. Men, seemingly, live not by sausage alone, nor even by sausage and sport. Dreams and poetry alone, on the other hand, are not only impractical but may even serve as a shield for arrogance, squalor, weakness, and envy. A possible compromise is suggested in Olesha's short story "The Cherry Pit," in which the hope is expressed that in future industrial complexes and sternly utilitarian housing some room may be left for flowers, dreams, and poets—although Olesha is sadly resigned to the likelihood that this would be but a token concession and that poets would, symbolically, be forbidden to beget children.

The period of the New Economic Policy (1921–8) saw a temporary truce between militantly communist sloganeering and highly pragmatic economic practices. The end of the civil war had brought about a degree of political apathy, while the population strove to adjust to the new order. The impact of the new political system on the routine of daily life provided rich material for comedy and satire. We have already mentioned the immensely popular *feuilletons* of Mikhail Zoshchenko. Valentin Katayev's comedy *Squaring the Circle* (1928) mocked the new *mores* based on the sexual licence then widespread as a reaction against the rigidities of bourgeois marriage. The same subject was treated by Panteleimon Romanov in his short stories and in the novel *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings* (1930). *The Embezzlers* (1927), Katayev's comic novel, related the wild adventures of two bank clerks, fugitives from justice, during their merry travels through the Russian countryside. A similar topic was taken up by a team of Soviet humorists, Il'ya Il'f and Evgeni Petrov (pseudonyms, respectively, of Il'ya Fainzil'berg and Evgeni Katayev, Valentin's younger brother). In their two novels—*The Twelve Chairs* (1928), and its sequel, *The Golden Calf* (1931)—they created the unforgettable Ostap Bender, a Soviet crook born of Soviet conditions, who proves that with a little private initiative a young man can turn to his own advantage a collectivistic economy, Soviet ideology, and communist mythology, just as Gogol's Chichikov (in *Dead Souls*) had discovered that there is potential profit in the purchase of deeds for peasants long dead. That Ostap Bender ultimately gets his deserts—as did, before him, the heroes of *The Embezzlers*—does not detract from the enjoyment offered by these books. Soviet justice had to emerge triumphant as a matter of convention, just as a pair of lovers in an old fairy-tale or in a Hollywood romance must, in the end, live happily ever after.

It is surely no accident that satire provides the most fascinating example so far of literary "archaeology" in this century. It is quite possible that similar excavations in the future will reveal a picture of early Soviet literature quite different from the one we know today. If the present picture tells us less about literary talent than about the nature and devastating powers of Soviet censorship, it also offers the hope that other Soviet writers have created "literature for the drawer" that remains, so far, submerged but that will ultimately come into the open.

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1936) had, as Gleb Struve points out in *Soviet Russian Literature 1917-50* (1951), "the reputation of an inside *émigré*"—that is, of a person who was spiritually an *émigré*, although he lived and died in the Soviet Union. Struve writes at some length about Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard* (1924), which is unique in Soviet writing in viewing the civil war from the vantage-point of the anti-Soviet forces, who are portrayed not as bloodthirsty villains but as tragically misguided people fighting for a lost cause. Struve also mentions Bulgakov's collection of fantastic stories brought out in 1925 under the title *Deviltry*, and in particular the tale entitled "The Adventures of Chichikov," an account of the trials and tribulations of Gogol's hero in Soviet surroundings. Edward J. Brown's *Russian Literature Since the Revolution* (1963) mentions the same works and also Bulgakov's entertaining play *Zoya's Apartment* (1926), the setting of which is a fashionable brothel patronized by the new Soviet ruling class. All these works were severely criticized on ideological grounds, and it was only thanks to Stalin's whim that Bulgakov escaped physical reprisals and spent his last years working for Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre.

Then, in the mid-1960s, three hitherto unknown works by Bulgakov appeared in rapid succession. *Black Snow* (the literal translation of the title is *A Theatrical Novel*) is a biting lampoon of one of Russian—and not only Russian—culture's most sacred cows, the Moscow Art Theatre. *The Master and Margarita* relates the adventures of the Devil in Moscow in the early 1930s; the novel included new, unconventional interpretations of the Passion of Christ and of the Faust legend. Finally, *The Heart of a Dog*—probably the most savage political satire known to have been written by a Soviet author—describes a dog who, through the transplantation of some human organs, learns to walk upright, drink vodka, shout obscenities, quote Marxist slogans, and thus gradually becomes accepted as a normal Soviet citizen. The manner of appearance of these works illustrates the workings of the Soviet censors. *Black Snow*, as far as can be ascertained, was allowed to appear in its entirety. *The Master and Margarita* was printed only after some 40 pages of text that were considered offensive for either political or moral reasons were excised by the censor (the complete and the censored versions of the novel were brought out simultaneously by two rival American publishers). *The Heart of a Dog* has appeared only outside the Soviet Union.

IV

The relatively permissive atmosphere of the 1920s, with their lively literary groupings, journals, and publishing houses, made that decade the most fruitful in almost 60 years of Soviet literature. The arid years began in 1929, when one militantly communist group, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, began, with the connivance of the authorities, to intimidate its rivals. The leader of the group, Leopold Averbakh, preached a doctrine of "planned" literature dealing with timely topics of socialist construction: the New Economic Policy had run its course and the country had embarked on a programme of feverish industrialization and forcible collectivization of agriculture. For inspiration, writers were sent to construction sites, often in teams: as in other areas of endeavour, better results were expected from collective work. The group declared quite openly that the purpose of this literature was not so much to create works of art as to generate enthusiasm for the First Five Year Plan.

It soon became apparent that the experiment was a failure. The works brought out by its members were remarkably uniform, the plots were monotonous, and the situations differed from each other only in their settings and the names of the protagonists. Most of the plays and novels dealt with the building of a particular factory or railroad, or with the establishment of a collective farm in a tradition-ridden village. The main characters were usually an upright communist and an enemy of the Soviet regime. The former would be a simple worker, or a young engineer, or a newly emancipated woman. The latter would in most cases be a *kulak*—a comparatively prosperous farmer—or a reactionary member of the old intelligentsia, a clergyman, or a surviving officer of the Imperial Army. The heroes were white, and the villains black. At the end of a typical novel or drama, the attempts to sabotage the task of socialist construction would meet with dismal failure, and the story would end on a happy note.

Most of the works of the period were novels, a genre that in the 1920s regained much of the ground it had temporarily lost during the symbolist era that came to an end during the first years of the Soviet regime. The demise of Symbolism (as well as of Acmeism, Futurism, and so on) was not entirely of natural causes: it had been hastened by political pressures that opposed "obscurity and mysticism" and that demanded of literature a clear-cut ideological commitment. These demands favoured the resurgence of prose in general, and most particularly of the novel—often the old, didactic novel reminiscent of the creations of turn-of-the-century populist writers but imbued, of course, with a Soviet ideological content.

Nevertheless, a number of such works showed a degree of originality and were not devoid of literary merit. Perhaps of greatest formal interest was Valentin Katayev's *Time, Forward!* (1932), a semi-documentary novel about the building of a coke-chemical industrial complex at Magnitogorsk. Among the stylistic features of *Time, Forward!* was the use of cinematic techniques—close-ups, side shots, vertical views—and of excerpts from newspapers and official documents, somewhat in the manner of John Dos Passos, then quite popular in the Soviet Union. Katayev also made effective use of a number of linguistic devices to heighten the effect of speed in the unfolding of events. Finally, the novel represents a noteworthy attempt at replacing an individual literary hero with a collective one—an attempt that was to be imitated (but with little success) in later years by a number of Soviet authors.

A more conventional novel was *Soviet River* (1931; the Russian title was *Sot'*) by Leonid Leonov, the author of *The Thief* (1927), a Dostoyevskian study of a disillusioned army officer unable to make the transition from the heroic days of the civil war to the mundane peacetime pursuits of the New Economic Policy. What set *Soviet River* apart from most of the "industrialization" novels was its attempts to portray the construction of a factory in northern Russia not as a routine conflict between advancing Soviet forces and retreating partisans of the old way of life, but rather as a new chapter in the age-old struggle between the city and the village—a standpoint that permitted the author to assume a posture of some ambiguity and relieved him of the obligation to praise his communist heroes and to damn the anti-Soviet villains blocking the path to progress.

Mikhail Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* (Vol. I, 1931) was undoubtedly the major novel dealing with the forcible collectivization of Russia's peasantry. Although Sholokhov's whole-hearted endorsement of the government's position is made clear, the novel objectively depicts the peasants' stubborn clinging to their meagre private plots and the resulting embittered clash with the authorities with a degree of understanding seldom found in other works dealing with this subject.

In the late 1930s the Communist Party's grip on literature was somewhat loosened. These were the years of the ever-growing Nazi menace, of the Popular Front abroad and, in a sense, at home. In the wake of the murderous purges during which the "internationalist" wing of the party was decimated, the authorities began to look with favour on the Russian patriotic sentiments of a large segment of the population. In Soviet literature, the late 1930s were marked by the reappearance of the bulky historical novel, which was used to inculcate a feeling of pride in a country that was hailed simultaneously as the world's only socialist state and as Holy Mother Russia. The great revival of the classics of 19th-century Russian literature was also in tune with the spirit of the times.

The year 1940 saw the completion of Sholokhov's two-decker epic, *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *The Don Flows Home to the Sea*, a vast canvas of the civil war that was to bring its author much acclaim at home and, in 1965, a Nobel Prize. Though not without flaws in structure and character delineation (the frequent comparisons with *War and Peace* are certainly extravagant), it offers some memorable scenes of Cossack life on the eve of and during World War I, and of the civil war, and some fine portraits of individual Cossacks. With the possible exception of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1957), it is the best treatment of the civil war theme in Soviet literature to date. (A controversy about the novel's authorship that flared briefly in the Soviet Union in the 1920s was revived in 1974 by the publication in France of an anonymous work claiming the novel for Fyodor Kryukov, a minor Cossack author.)

An equally ambitious but less successful novel about the civil war was Aleksei Tolstoy's *The Road to Calvary* (1941). More effective was the same author's *Peter the Great* (1929–45), and its portrait of the ruthless tsar who transformed Russia from a backward country into a European power was a clever attempt to create a parallel with Joseph Stalin and an apologia for his tyranny.

After Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 the pendulum swung once again in favour of "oral" literature, such as poetry and drama. Some novels continued to appear, most of them extolling the heroism of Soviet soldiers (such as Konstantin Simonov's *Days and Nights* [1944]), but the simple emotional message calling on the people to defend their country against the Nazi hordes was more effectively conveyed through stage performances and recitations of verse. Aleksandr Korneichuk's play *The Front* (1942) had the unique distinction of being serialized in

Pravda; Leonid Leonov's *Invasion* (1942) was performed by army *ensembles*. Simonov's impassioned but sentimental poems, such as "Wait for Me" and "Do You Remember, Alyosha, the Roads of Smolensk?" were memorized by millions. The emphasis on simple Russian patriotism—an unofficial moratorium had been declared on communist appeals to class consciousness—and a tolerant attitude toward intimate lyric verse made possible the reappearance in print of some of the hitherto ostracized poets, most notably of Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak.

By cruel irony the victorious outcome of the war brought about a reversal of the relatively liberal attitudes of the war years. The 1946 decrees of the Central Committee led to bellicose orthodoxy and a reign of terror. Writers and critics who were insufficiently militant were denounced as "apolitical." Those who timidly suggested that literature must also be concerned with aesthetic values were branded "formalist." Novelists and poets who believed that foreign literature had—or had had even in the distant past—anything to offer Russia were condemned as "rootless cosmopolitans" (a term of opprobrium that had strong anti-Semitic overtones) and accused of "criminal servility to the capitalist West." Soviet men of letters were exhorted to join in the Cold War effort.

At no time has the quality of Soviet writing been as low as in the years 1947 to 1953. This was *not* due to the fact that most of the works published dealt with collective farms and factories and that their heroes were tractor drivers and workers. The deadeningly dull quality of these works, such as Vasili Azhayev's *Far from Moscow* (1948), Pyotr Pavlenko's *Happiness* (1947), and Semyon Babayevsky's *The Cavalier of the Gold Star* (1947), was due to the false psychology of their heroes and the intolerable didacticism of their plots.

The Soviet book market of the late 1940s and the early 1950s was thus devoid of good new literature, and millions of Soviet readers turned to the only available alternatives—the classics of Western and pre-revolutionary Russian literature (almost no new Western writing was published until Stalin's death).

The last years of Stalin's rule saw the intensification of a Soviet practice begun in the 1930s—rewriting some of the better-known novels, poems, and plays to bring them into conformity with the current ideological and artistic policies of the state. Works expressing political and aesthetic moods of bygone years had to be altered in order to deprive Soviet readers of historical perspective, which might become embarrassing or even dangerous to the authorities if applied by the citizens to evaluate contemporary events. The rewriting of *belles-lettres* for political purposes was not and is not an exception but a rule in Soviet literature. Since Stalin's death the fact that a new edition of a book is a revised version may be indicated on the title page of the volume, but no such formalities were observed in earlier years.

V

The origins of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, a creed first enunciated at the founding congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934—thereafter the sole literary organization in the Soviet Union—are still shrouded in mystery. There are those who attribute its authorship to Gor'ky; others claim that it was inspired by Stalin himself. Officially, Socialist Realism remains a state literary religion to this day. It has its early patristic writings (the works of the radical Russian critics of the 19th century and, to a lesser extent, of the Marxist classics) and it has its saints and martyrs (e.g. the novelist Nikolai Ostrovsky who, after being almost totally incapacitated in the civil war, produced such uplifting works as *How the Steel Was Tempered*, which sold many millions of copies). It has its church holidays (such as the scrupulously observed anniversaries of Gor'ky, Mayakovsky, and so on) and a reigning synod that must, at least in theory, meet every few years. It maintains a system of inquisition, and has perfected the *auto-da-fé*. It chastises those who have temporarily strayed from the path of righteousness but who are not beyond salvation, and excommunicates those whose sins are unforgivable. What is tragic is not that Socialist Realism is the official creed, but that no other is tolerated.

There are few official articles of the socialist realist faith, but over the years critics and scholars have produced a vast body of exegesis and commentary. These are vague on the definition of realism, because a number of patently non-realistic writers (such as Mayakovsky and Brecht) are retroactively claimed as its own. On the other hand, literary practice (if not theory) demonstrates that Socialist Realism favours a conventional, academic realism in both prose and verse that frankly attempts to imitate the 19th-century masters. There is, however, an official formulation of the "socialist" ingredient, although even that has been, for more than 40 years now, subject to endless polemics about its limits and implications, and the strictness with which its postulates are to be enforced. In brief, the specifics of Soviet Socialist Realism (there are now some national variants of the doctrine in some of the countries of the Soviet bloc) are the requirements of *ideinost'*, which may be roughly defined as "high seriousness" in the sense of possessing ideological content; *partiinost'*, which demands that the writer's position be unequivocally partisan and eschew all tendencies toward "bourgeois objectivity"; *narodnost'*, which is usually interpreted in the sense of accessibility to the average reader; and *tipichnost'*, which requires that the characters and their motivations, as well as the conflicts and their outcomes, be "typical" of Soviet reality. The last point contains an ominous qualification: the "typical," it is emphasized, is not to be confused with the "average," that most frequently encountered in real life. The "typical" is to be projected into the future. It is, in effect, an exhortation to depict life not as it is, but as the party wishes it to be and hopes that it will be sometime in the future.

If the first three commandments of Socialist Realism resulted in the production of literature that was militantly didactic and artistically unexciting, the interpretation of the last demand injected a strong note of hypocrisy. Unseemly features of Soviet life were wished away, so to speak, because they were "untypical," as were ordinary human vices, weaknesses, doubts, aspirations, desires, dislikes, and clashes—in short, anything that could be classified as a "bourgeois survival" or a temporary difficulty and that would, in the party's projection, eventually disappear. And conversely, human traits that would, it was hoped, come into existence with the advent of Communism, such as a complete subjugation of personal interests to the needs of the society at large, and even technological efficiency and economic abundance—all of them, as yet, only distant dreams—were to be portrayed as if they already existed in the Soviet Union. It was this incongruity of presenting visions of a glorious future against the background of physical reality, of merging myth with conventional devices of literary realism, that accounted, in the estimation of Andrei Sinyavsky (in his essay "What Is Socialist Realism?" which was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published abroad in 1959 under the pseudonym of Abram Tertz), for the dismal failure of Soviet literature of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Not surprisingly, the issue was raised in the Soviet Union within a few months of Stalin's death in March 1953. For obvious reasons, no direct challenge was made of the entire doctrine of Socialist Realism. On the contrary, as in every heresy, the charge was that some of the high priests were distorting the true teachings of the Church. The point of contention was the problem of Soviet literature's "sincerity."

The participants in the debate included some of the country's best-known writers, among them the late Il'ya Erenburg (1891–1967)—who had, over the years, traversed the tortuous path from the ideologically iconoclastic *Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito* (1922) to some of the worst pot-boilers of Stalinist Socialist Realism—as well as a number of newcomers. The gist of their argument was that by writing "insincerely" Soviet writers, though perhaps with the best of intentions, were defeating their own purpose: their works, instead of educating the masses, simply evoked disbelief and, in the final analysis, undermined the authority of Soviet literature.

The attacks on the orthodox practitioners of Socialist Realism (they were branded "dogmatist" and "varnishers of Soviet reality") and the conservative forces' onslaughts on the liberals (they, in turn, were accused of attempting to disarm Soviet literature ideologically and, indeed, of "slandering Soviet people"), the "thaws" and the "freezes," have now been continuing for over 20 years.

That the literature written by the liberals has, as a body, been artistically superior to that written by the orthodox writers, cannot simply be ascribed to a lack of literary talent among the conservatives (they include, among the older authors, Sholokhov and Fedin, to mention but two of the best-known). Nor is it merely the opinion of Western scholars: the overwhelming preference for the writings of the "liberals" can be gauged from the frequent reports that their books disappear from book-stores sometimes only hours after their arrival, whereas those of their opponents do not sell. The chief reason for the inferior quality of the unreconstructed Stalinist and neo-Stalinist writing is to be sought in its rigid adherence to a literary doctrine that makes the creation of artistically satisfying works all but impossible.

Il'ya Erenburg's *The Thaw* (1954) is no literary masterpiece, but it was a milestone in the history of Soviet writing of the post-Stalin period because it was, in effect, a fictionalized discourse on the need for truthfulness and "sincerity" in art. Its protagonists are two painters, one a poor but independent artist, the other a mendacious "varnisher" who produces to order canvases depicting happy and carefree collective farmers. Ehrenburg's novel may be said to have cleared the ground for the subsequent discussion in Soviet literature of a variety of matters that had hitherto been "insincerely" ignored. Among these were the following propositions:

1. "Stalin may be dead, but individual Stalinists and vestiges of Stalinism remain." The first to tackle this theme was Leonid Zorin, whose play *The Guests* (1954) was violently attacked not only by "dogmatic" *littérateurs*, but by the Ministry of Culture itself. Nevertheless, a few other works continued to raise this problem. The most notorious to appear in the Soviet Union was Evgeni Evtushenko's short poem "Stalin's Heirs,"

which urges that the guard at the late dictator's grave be doubled and tripled to prevent his rising from the dead. The most searching treatment of the theme was Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*, first published in 1968 in Italy in the original Russian; it has not, however, been published in the Soviet Union.

2. "Stalinist (as opposed to Soviet or communist) miscarriages of justice were not merely incidents but affected the lives of millions of citizens and their families." The most famous work dealing with the subject is Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), one of the most accomplished novels to emerge from Russia in several decades. Evgenia Ginzburg's politically much more loyalist and apologetic *Into the Whirlwind* was inexplicably banned in the Soviet Union but was published abroad in 1967—as was Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* in 1968.

3. "The economic well-being of Soviet citizens, particularly the peasantry, leaves much to be desired; there is still much poverty and ignorance in the Soviet countryside." This thesis is advanced in Evtushenko's long poem "Station Winter" (1955), in Nikolai Zhdanov's short story "A Journey Home" (1956), and in other works by young writers. Often the village is seen through the eyes of a successful young big-city intellectual returning after a long absence to his native farm or town. Sociologically, Solzhenitsyn's minor masterpiece, the poignant tale "Matryona's Hut" (1963), falls into the same category, as does "Vologda Weddings," a beautifully wrought short story by the late Aleksandr Yashin.

4. "Public lives are only part of human existence; private lives are equally deserving of a writer's attention." Works reflecting this attitude include, above all, lyric poetry, which has been enjoying a major revival in the last 20 years (important poets to emerge during this period include Andrei Voznesensky, Bella Akhmadulina, and Novella Matveyeva); some fine short stories by Yuri Kazakov, Vladimir Tendryakov, and Yuri Nagibin; and a few novels, among which one should single out Victor Nekrasov's *Kira Georgievna* (1961), the story of a cosy yet empty marriage, and Vera Panova's *The Four Seasons* (1954), a pleasant, unpretentious work about the day-to-day concerns of ordinary Soviet families. A glorious paean to the right of an individual to defy all the forces of nature and society, to assert his autonomy, and to fight for his personal happiness, is Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1957). The novel, as well as Pasternak's brilliant contributions to Russian poetry over many years, earned him a Nobel Prize the following year. He was, however, forced by the Soviet authorities to renounce the prize, and he died two years later a broken and

lonely man. It is noteworthy that the novel (which has not, to this day, been published in the Soviet Union) provoked the anger of the Soviet establishment precisely because it affirms not only the independence of the individual in a society, but indeed the individual's primacy, including his right to secede from society if he so chooses: this is the essence of the angry 5000-word letter sent to him by the editorial board of *Novy mir* over the signature of Simonov, explaining why the novel could not possibly be accepted for publication—surely the longest rejection slip ever received by any author. Pasternak's novel was considered dangerous to the Soviet system because it advances a thesis that could not easily be refuted, namely that all politics and all ideology may be quite irrelevant to the achievement of individual happiness, and that complete freedom from ideological pressures may be conducive to artistic creativity.

5. "The time has come to do away with the practice of relegating unpleasant or embarrassing chapters of the past to a 'memory hole.' " The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the appearance of scores of memoirs by writers, artists, and one-time public figures that tried—guardedly, to be sure—to resurrect the memories of scores of "unpersons" and "unevents" of earlier eras. All their evasions and distortions notwithstanding, these memoirs served an important purpose. Those of Erenburg were a reminder of the once-close ties between the Soviet intelligentsia and the left-wing artistic world of western Europe. Those of Valentin Katayev and of the late Konstantin Paustovsky resurrected much that was forgotten or suppressed in the official annals of Soviet Russia's own past.

6. "There is a clash of interests and values between generations, between fathers and sons; ideas that inspired the former may appear trite to the latter." This theme is dealt with in numerous short stories and in at least one important novel, Vasili Aksyonov's *A Ticket to the Stars* (1961), a Soviet counterpart, as it were, of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (which, incidentally, was extremely popular in the Soviet Union with the younger generation of readers).

7. "Some writers have begun to break away from the stylistic near-uniformity of earlier Soviet writing." Many of them, such as the poet Voznesensky, appear to be attracted by the formal experiments of the Symbolists and the Futurists. More interestingly, in his *Grass of Oblivion* (1968), Valentin Katayev (then 70 years old) made a brave attempt to shed his socialist realist garb and to return, at least in part, to his expressionist youth.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that even the works of the "liberals" and the nonconformists had to be cleared by the censorship, however reluctantly. It is for this reason that the Soviet literary "underground" acquires a degree of importance it could not otherwise claim: it serves as a hypothetical yardstick of what many Soviet authors might be writing, were it not for the censorship restraints, which are severe and capricious.

A significant body of "unauthorized" Soviet literature is now available in the West, and it seems to indicate that, but for the censorship restrictions, Soviet writers would be devoting more attention to the various kinds of social injustice in their homeland. Thus, in the writings of Andrei Sinyavsky ("Abram Tertz") and Yuli Daniel ("Nikolai Arzhak")—two writers sentenced to prison in 1965 for publishing abroad "slanderous" statements about the Soviet system—one finds scores of manifestations of a burning hatred of anti-Semitism; the only "legal" Soviet works on the subject were Evtushenko's "Babi Yar" (1961) and Anatoli Kuznetsov's novel of the same name in 1967. Both men wrote of Nazi anti-Semitism, yet even that produced violent denunciations because of the implication, however vague, that some racial hatred exists in the Soviet Union as well. There are, no doubt, many other works that delve into man's inner problems; many works, unknown in the West and unpublished in the Soviet Union, that are introspective, undidactic, and—surprising as it may seem—unpreoccupied with political problems of any sort.

In surveying the fortunes of Russian literature under the Soviet regime, one often finds parallels with the literary polemics that raged in the previous century between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, the aesthetes and the utilitarians. A much more telling parallel suggests itself, however: the clash between the literary traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries. In essence, the orthodox communist writers espouse an aesthetic-political doctrine that advocates a neo-classical literature, complete with idealized, noble heroes, despicable villains, obeisance to the omnipotent and omniscient monarch and the state religion—not excluding even the *deus ex machina* denouements in which virtue emerges triumphant from its final confrontation with error and sin. It advocates a literature that is a handmaiden of the state, that prides itself (in its official status at the Court and in its educational functions) on advancing the state's cause, and that does not even aspire to be an end in itself. The "liberal" Soviet writers, on the other hand, continue the traditions of the 19th century, of the age of Russian Realism, but not to the exclusion of the Romantics. They see the function of literature as serving, primarily, as the conscience of a nation—an idea promulgated by Pushkin in "The Prophet"—even if its message (again, following in the footsteps of Pushkin) is unpopular not only with the rulers but with the masses as well. Writers, the liberals suggest, must denounce injustice even if perpetrated in the name of a noble cause—as shown by Russian writing, from the unfortunate clerk in Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* (1833) to the impassioned speeches of Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov and the Man from the Underground. They must defend the underdog even if he is as worthless and unattractive as the scribe in Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842). They must champion the underprivileged social groupings in their society, which—it so happens—are now the same as those in Imperial Russia: the peasants, the prisoners, the women, the ethnic minorities. And above all, they must serve as moral guides to their compatriots, to offer them solace, hope, and understanding.

Since the early 1970s many of these writers have been either allowed or "encouraged" to emigrate. There is now the makings of a new *émigré* Russian literature equivalent in some ways to the one that developed in the 1920s. Like its predecessor it includes a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Solzhenitsyn, as well as a number of established, if less famous, prose writers, including Vladimir Maksimov, Victor Nekrasov, Grigori Svirsky, and Anatoli Kuznetsov. Its ranks include such gifted poets as Iosif Brodsky and Naum Korzhavin, at least one brilliant critic in Andrei Sinyavsky ("Abram Tertz"), and surely the best satirist now writing in Russian, Aleksandr Galich. It has even launched a major new literary journal, *Kontinent.*

There is little likelihood that the idea of "pure art" will gain a significant following among Russian writers in the foreseeable future. That could be expected only if the moral and ethical burdens at present borne by the "liberal" writers were assumed by a free press, a socially active Church, and a government truly responsive to the wishes of its subjects—or if the writers were to abandon all hope of ameliorating the lot of their fellow-citizens by championing their cause in literary works. Regrettably, there are few prospects of realizing the former; fortunately, there is no reason to fear the latter.

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CHAPTER 14

Literature and Politics in a Post-Capitalist Society

István Mészáros*

The Historical Background

Radical literature in capitalist societies originated as a form of protest against the evils of a commercialized and "reified" social order. The intellectuals who protested had a variety of clearly distinguishable motives. Writers such as Julien Benda, Anatole France, Romain Rolland, Arnold Zweig, Heinrich Mann, Johannes R. Becher, León Felipe, Tibor Déry, and so on, embarked on their long journey of revolt out of a general humanitarian concern; others—to name but Paul Éluard and Georg Lukács—rebelled, in the first place, against the existing form of society because they felt that it was hostile to the *raison d'être* of art and to the integrity of the artist. And one can even find writers, such as Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, who identified themselves with the perspectives of Socialism in order to free themselves from the impasse of their first revolt: the hopeless nihilism of their "boundless negation" and rejection of everything.[1]

What happens to the literature of protest once its immediate objectives are realized, once the capitalist order is overthrown? The preoccupation of Western literature with "inwardness" and "alienation" is well-known. Max Jacob writes: "The world within one man: that is the modern poet," and Pierre Reverdy sees the poet as someone who is forced to "probe the mystery of his interior existence."

We can find expressions of similar feelings in all Western literatures, including English, from A. E. Housman, who defines man as "a stranger and afraid/In a world [he] never made," to the representatives of the younger generation of poets who, like Jenny Joseph, describe the "human condition" as a "habit of life" that keeps man "inevitably within its circle, inevitably an exile."[2] What is the situation of writers in a post-capitalist society? Can they leave the realm of "inwardness" and their much-deplored "exile"? Do they find fulfilment in public involvement? Do they find that now literature can fully develop in accordance with what they considered to be its *raison d'être*?

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* Professor of Philosophy, York University, Toronto.

It would be easy and tempting to answer these questions with a straightforward No. Such an answer, however, would be not only superficial but also misleading and totally uninteresting. What has happened needs to be studied in detail; but before looking at particular literary and critical works, we may draw attention to a few general issues that arise in this context. First, it should be emphasized that we are not dealing with a homogeneous phenomenon. The countries in which governments inspired by Marxism-Leninism have been established—from Russia to Yugoslavia and from Poland to China—represent different stages or phases of social development, and so does their literature. Programmes designed to "apply the principles of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics" or to "create a socialist culture" are greatly complicated by these social and cultural differences, as party functionaries in charge of the direction of literature have had to find out in the end. Similarly, the conclusions reached in this essay as regards the situation in Hungary would hold true only with qualification for other countries.

From the middle of the 19th century onward, literature in eastern Europe was on the whole more politically committed than literature in the West. (Even the first half of the 19th century shows a marked difference in this respect, although political involvement in that period was rather less direct.[3]) This was due not only to the belated character of social developments in these countries, but equally to the institutional form in which socio-political developments took place in eastern Europe. The point of obvious contrast is the absence of democratic institutions, and indeed the ultimate failure to create them in the political struggles of the 19th century. The political role of the intellectuals was intensified under such conditions. The necessity of working within antiquated feudal or semi-feudal political institutions had imposed an "internal censorship" on the politicians themselves, including the more radical ones. Consequently, the task of radical political opposition fell to intellectuals who operated outside the established political framework. This is why a poet such as Sándor Petőfi—who died on the battlefield at Segesvár in 1849 at the age of 26—could champion, when he was only 19, a social and political programme that was not only much more radical, but also incomparably more far-sighted, than that of the most radical active politician of his country, Lajos Kossuth. Similarly, the great poet Endre Ady (1877–1919) represented, during the first two decades of the 20th century, a socio-political line far superior to anything conceived of by the so-called Hungarian Parliament. This tradition of extra-parliamentary opposition remained alive among intellectuals during the decades that followed.

An interesting difference already shows itself here between Russia and other eastern European countries. There is a strong tradition of political thought in Russia, from Herzen to Lenin, that is independent of literature. Pushkin and Gogol', Tolstoy and Gor'ky, have no claims to originality as political thinkers when measured by the attainments of Russian thought in their time. In Hungary, on the other hand, where political thought remains backward, poets such as Petőfi, Ady, and Attila József (1905–37) do have such claims. Against the background of their tradition, Russian writers more readily agreed to being "guided" by politicians than their counterparts in other eastern European countries, who considered it their duty to be "political seers" of the destiny of their nation.

Two further points have to be raised in this context. The first is that whereas Russia produced a very original form of Marxism that was widely diffused in the country well before the October Revolution, in other eastern European countries there were only isolated Marxists of stature—Rosa Luxemburg in Poland, for instance, or Georg Lukács in Hungary—but no comparable continuity of a nationally rooted Marxist tradition. (Significantly enough, both Rosa Luxemburg and Lukács developed their theories without paying much attention to the national problem.) Differences of degree existed among the eastern European countries in this respect, of course, just as there were differences in the effectiveness and intensity of the various anti-Nazi resistance movements, which were also very important. Nevertheless, it remains true that in these countries the programme of "building a socialist culture" had to be attempted without the backing of a broadly based and deeply rooted local Marxist tradition. The second point is that in the post-war period cultural and political developments have taken place in eastern Europe—with the sole exception of Yugoslavia—under Soviet control. Thus the conflicts that soon appeared between writers and politicians, between literature and politics, only partly concerned the issue of "socialism *versus* capitalism," i.e. the nature of the social order that was supposed to take the place of the one that had collapsed during the war. A great deal of the resentment that writers voiced was directed against foreign control, against *Gleichschaltung* (that is, political uniformity), and against administrative interference in literary matters in the interest of that *Gleichschaltung*. Discussion about the character of post-war social developments inevitably became mixed up with national conflicts of different kinds.

Finally, we may briefly review the problem of China, where the difficulty of making meaningful generalizations about literature in post-capitalist society becomes acute. The Chinese themselves tend to ignore the difficulty, with the result that they misread European cultural phenomena. Thus, for example, their denunciations of Beethoven's alleged "bourgeois decadence" are understandable in terms of the immediate concerns of the Chinese cultural revolution, but they sound grotesque as aesthetic judgments. They are indeed a far cry from Lenin's judgments, for Lenin—who could hardly be accused of "bourgeois decadence"—described Beethoven's music, in a conversation with Gor'ky, as "divine." And this was by no means an isolated emotional outburst, but an integral part of Lenin's conception of a socialist cultural policy. As he stressed in his radical opposition to "Proletcult autonomy" (a "theoretically unsound and practically harmful attempt to invent one's own particular brand of culture"):

> Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than 2000 years of the development of human thought and culture. Only further work on this basis and in this direction . . . can be recognized as the development of a genuine proletarian culture.[4]

The concept of cultural continuity was inevitably problematical in China. For just as the "Asiatic mode of production" was suddenly thrust by the successful Chinese Revolution into the complexities of 20th-century world economy, so was the challenging task of radically enlarging its own basis imposed upon a very narrowly based Chinese culture that had suffered from centuries of ossification. In literature there was even a grave linguistic problem: how to replace the rigid, anachronistic, and mannered *venyen* language of traditional Chinese literature by the commonly used *payhua* language, a problem of linguistic regeneration that European literatures had solved at the latest more than a century earlier. Mao Tse-tung knew very well that, in principle, socialist culture "should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries,"[5] and he asserted:

> It makes a difference whether or not we have such examples, the difference between crudeness and refinement, between roughness and

> polish, between a low and a high level, and between slower and faster work. Therefore, we must on no account reject the legacies of the ancients and the foreigners or refuse to learn from them, even though they are the works of the feudal or bourgeois classes.[6]

But translating an ideological principle into creative literary practice is by no means a simple matter, especially if some of the conditions of such translation are altogether missing or only partly present. The "bourgeois cultural tradition" praised by Lenin for its significant achievements was virtually non-existent in China. Western epigonism in 20th-century Chinese literature was widespread, however, affecting—quite understandably—even those progressive writers, such as Kuo Mo-jo,[7] who later joined the revolutionary forces. Thus, if Mao Tse-tung writes his poems in traditional *venyen* language and at the same time advises others not to follow his example but to practise the ways of the "new poetry," the contradiction is revealing. His advice concerns the validity of a general principle, whereas his practice shows the difficulties involved in applying it. The problem is absent from Lenin's frame of reference because for him "the achievements of bourgeois culture" and the "national cultural heritage" were not in conflict with each other; Mao Tse-tung accepts Lenin's principle on general theoretical grounds rather than as a practicable working principle for cultural policy in China at a given historical stage of development. In the absence of a "rich Chinese bourgeois cultural legacy," and in view of the ossified character of traditional Chinese mandarin culture, the element of break with non-socialist cultural phenomena becomes necessarily overriding in cultural practice.

Perhaps the most important complicating factor in the Chinese situation lies in their constant attack on "bourgeois individualism," often described as "*petit-bourgeois* individualism." Now it is undeniable that Europe's cultural heritage is "individualistic": the nearer we come to the present time, the more this is true. Its individualism is inseparable from the general development of the human personality, in the course of the last few centuries, in the direction of greater particularization and autonomy. This was the tradition inherited also by Russian and eastern European writers, however much they identified themselves with the task of constructing a socialist culture. To them there seemed to be no contradiction between their new aims and the culturally embedded ideal of individual fulfilment—the social individual's integrity and self-conscious self-determination, as Marx had put it long before. Thus, the struggle against Stalinist-collectivist violations of the human personality became a main concern of socialist literature in essential continuity with a deeply rooted cultural tradition.

In China, however, these developments toward an increasingly greater autonomy of the individual human personality simply had not taken place on a comparable scale. This is why the straightforward transplantation of Western literary models produced only epigonism, or formal experiment at best.

As a result of this difference, and of the need to transform the entire social fabric of China, it was, in Mao Tse-tung's words, "necessary to solve thoroughly the problem of the relationship between the individual and the masses." He went on:

> This couplet from a poem by Lu Hsün should be our motto:
>
> Fierce-browed, I coolly defy a thousand pointing fingers,
> Head bowed, like a willing ox I serve the children.
>
> The "thousand pointing fingers" are our enemies, and we will never yield to them, no matter how ferocious. The "children" here symbolize the proletariat and the masses. All Communists, all revolutionaries, all revolutionary literary and art workers should learn from the example of Lu Hsün and be "oxen" for the proletariat and the masses, bending their backs to the task until their dying day. Intellectuals who want to integrate themselves with the masses, who want to serve the masses, must go through a process in which they and the masses come to know each other well. This process may, and certainly will, involve much pain and friction, but if you have the determination, you will be able to fulfil these requirements.[8]

No doubt this credo is unlikely to appeal to socialist writers not only in the West but also in Russia and in eastern Europe, especially today. But it should not be forgotten that even in the evaluation of the greatest bourgeois representatives of European culture, "individual autonomy" is a problematic[9] concept, and by no means a straightforward ideal. This is incomparably more so in a Chinese setting. Mao Tse-tung's interpretation of Lu Hsün's motto expresses a real dilemma: a concern about the possible corrosive effects of a vastly enlarged cultural basis—an absolute "must" in China's contemporary position—if it is not closely integrated "into the new epoch of the masses." European cultural influences that might contribute to the intensification of "individualism" must therefore be excluded, at least for the time being.

Conflicts Within Russia*

In the aftermath of the 1917 revolution, the conflict between literature and politics developed in confusing complexity. Although Lenin himself condemned the "Proletcult" concept, representatives of this trend continued to find a great deal of unofficial favour with party bureaucrats. Their narrow conception of a socialist culture excluded even writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), on the grounds of his alleged "individualism" and "formalism." The attacks to which he was repeatedly subjected were no small factor in his suicide. In more general terms, the dilemma confronting all Russian writers lay in the evaluation of their own experience in relation to the dramatic changes taking place in society. The dilemma was strongly felt by many, and movingly expressed by Sergei Yesenin (1895–1925) in one of the poems written not long before his suicide:

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* A broader survey of Russian literature in this period is given in Ch. 13, "Russian Literature in the Twentieth Century."

> I don't know where shall I end. . . . Perhaps
> I cannot understand the message of the new life—
> Yet I'd like to see this sad, poor Russian homeland
> Growing in might.
>
> The sky howls and resounds while I listen
> To the far and near yelping machines.
> If the noise of creaky tumbrils started its rule again
> I'd block my ears with both my hands.[10]

Still under the shadow of the detested old social order, the readiness to take the blame upon oneself for feeling "homeless" in a socialist homeland was a reaction that reappeared again and again in the trials of the 1930s. The "rights" and "wrongs" of that turbulent epoch were so intertwined that the intellectuals involved could not find in themselves the strength until much later—in many respects, too late—to oppose the "wrongs" with the necessary radicalism.

The fact that in Russia political theory developed separately from creative literature proved to be a great drawback at a time when to distinguish the "wrongs" from the "rights" would have required a solid political comprehension of all the complexities of the situation. Vladimir Mayakovsky was perhaps the only great poet to express powerfully and with a remarkable spirit of political independence the dangers of bureaucratization; he truly had the soul of a "people's tribune," rather than of a "guided writer" or pre-programmed "engineer of the soul." But even his vision was limited by the omission of the very apex of the bureaucratic edifice from his criticism: a fact that enabled Stalin to canonize him after his death. Was it perhaps his insight, in the end, into the nature of the whole structure, and thus his realization of the problematic character of the remedy he recommended[11]—an appeal to the highest levels of power in order to put right the aberrations of the middle regions—that added the last drops to the glass of his ultimate total despair?

Opposition and dissent in literature became impossible in the political atmosphere of the "permanent state of emergency" that characterized Stalin's era, all the more so because genuine states of emergency—not only during the foreign intervention and the civil war, but also during the famines and World War II—greatly complicated the issues. If there was any politically articulate dissent in the field of literature, it certainly could not see the light of day. There was simply no room for concrete social and political criticism.

When the individual is deprived of his political dimension, the enormous fracture thus created in the interrelated totality of his experiences deeply affects all his attitudes. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Dr Zhivago denouncing, with a metaphysical radicalism fortified by the traditions of Russian mysticism, the *vanitatum vanitas* of "human idolatry" as manifest in history, and looking for authentic values in transcendence of the historical sphere. The same underlying tendency had long been apparent in Boris Pasternak's poetry. Its impenetrability—one might say its "hermeticism," were not this term reserved for a similar trend in Italian poetry—is forbidding only if we want to open its hermetically sealed doors with the keys of some particular historical reference. We should adopt instead the keys that Pasternak (1890–1960) himself puts into our hands, such as the following lines:

> Lightly to waken, see again,
> shake from the heart its wordy litter
> and live in future days unchoked,
> surely all that needs no great cunning.[12]

Thus, everything can and must be read literally:

> You make me think the Dnieper there,
> in its green skin of creeks and ditches,
> the centre-of-the-earth's complaint book
> for us to write our daily notes in.
>
> Your presence here is like a call
> to sit down hastily at midday,
> to read it through from A to Z
> and then to write your nearness in it.[13]

In this poetic vision the "here" is directly transferred to the plane of a timeless transcendence of history. The actual, temporal "here" is dreaded and rejected:

> The storm's destroyed our land with fire.
> Bird, will you know your nest again?
> My leaf, more timid than a goldfinch,
> silken and shy, why do you struggle?
>
> O song that's clung to me, don't struggle!
> Tearing apart won't help us now.
> When we two tossed up there we never
> thought of the deathly adverb "here."[14]

No matter how dramatic some of his images appear, Pasternak's overall compositional principle is the creation of a great standstill, the reassertion —in opposition to the hustle and bustle of the historic drama—of the absolute validity of an ultimate cosmic peace. Often the poem is composed of a succession of sharply delineated "still lives," some of them in sombre mood ("Last night beyond the park the marsh was shivering./The sun no sooner rose than it was gone./No harebell now drinks the rheumatic dews/ and dirty lilac dropsy coats the birches."[15]). Others are in a momentarily more serene mood (talking about dawn: "Like a framemaker with his moulding/it came. Trees, houses, temples, framed/in that intangible square/not of this world but of the other."[16]). The dramatic temporality of historical action is turned down as "past":

> We're few, perhaps no more than three.
> We're fiery devils from the Donetz
> beneath a grey and fleeting bark
> of rains, of clouds, of soldiers' councils,
> of poetry and of discussions
> on transport problems and on art.
>
> Once we were people. Now we're epochs.
> It struck us—when its train flashed by
> —we're tundra to the panting tender's
> tune, to pistons', sleepers' rending.
> And we'll fly off, break through and touch,
> we'll whirl round like a gust of crows.
>
> It's past. You'll understand it later.[17]

What is present is eternity, and the authentic "here" is an immediate instance of the sphere that transcends history. ("The sad wood needs a rest beneath the snow/in the eternal slumber of the bear-dens."[18]) In this vision there is no place for suicide, no matter how tragic the conflicts of temporality might appear:

> In time to come, I tell them, we'll be equal
> to any living now. If cripples, then
> no matter: we shall just have been run over
> by "New Man" in the waggon of his "Plan."
>
> And when from death the tablet doesn't save us,
> then time will hurry on more freely still
> to that far point, where "Five year plan" the second
> prolongs the dissertations of the soul.
>
> Don't kill yourselves, don't grieve. I'll still be with you
> that day; by all my weaknesses I swear.
> And the strong men are promised their survival
> from the worst plagues that have subdued us here.[19]

Thus, although Pasternak's negation is much more radical than Yesenin's or Mayakovsky's, he can endure, *a priori*, anything that may come because his values cannot be affected by the products of time. The world of Pasternak's poetic imagery announces and stresses over and over again the eternal triumph of unshakable permanence over the surface-scratching struggle of the historical sphere.

The radicalism of Pasternak's negation was far too categorical to satisfy those who have been seeking, for the last 20 years, an answer to the question of "what went wrong." Superseding the rather timid attempts of Il'ya Erenburg's *Ottepel'* (1954; The Thaw), critical investigations have gradually extended from the point of reasserting the need for a greater freedom in literature to a heart-searching examination of some tragic aspects of Soviet development—for instance, in the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn (b. 1918) and of several representatives of the younger generation. Thus, the quest for a proper relationship between literature and politics has grown into an increasingly more dramatic confrontation with the aims and realities of the Soviet road to Socialism.

In other eastern European countries a similar *crise de conscience* has been in evidence since the changes that followed Stalin's death. The crisis of the intellectuals, however, goes even farther back. Its first phase, following the confusing ambiguities of the immediately post-war years, was marked by the so-called "Year of Change": the complete Stalinization of the People's Democracies and the elimination of all opposition from their internal political life. (This was a phase in which writers were expected not only to believe that their trusted old friends, such as Rajk and Slansky, had been deceitful traitors all the time, but also to adopt a posture in literature characterized by "unceasing vigilance" and a ready acceptance of the decreed "state of emergency.") The second phase, a few years later, deepened the crisis by revealing an elaborate system of rigged trials and by denying the historical justification originally claimed for them. Writers started to feel responsible for their abdication of responsibility at the time of the "Year of Change." The crisis was aggravated by the explosions of 1956 and their aftermath: several outstanding socialist writers found themselves in prison for their alleged "counter-revolutionary crimes." But what was perhaps more significant was that, even when the writers were released, no solution to the grave social, political, and moral problems was anywhere in sight. It was impossible to solve them in the old Stalinist way any longer, yet new ways of working out a solution had still not been found. In the last few years, intense international complications—the Sino-Soviet dispute, the Czechoslovak crisis, and the sharp controversy among communist parties that followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968—have made this crisis deeper and more extensive than ever before.

The intellectuals involved in this crisis have started to defy all the earlier taboos and to raise questions about the root causes of troubles that they have experienced. Were they necessary or avoidable? Were they inherent in the nature of Socialism or aberrations from it? If aberrations, what caused them? How were such crimes possible? Whose responsibility were they? Is there a guarantee against their repetition? Where does one go from the present crisis? How would it be possible to put things on a new footing? What can the individual do in the present situation?

These and similar questions occupy a great deal of contemporary literature in eastern Europe.

"Power Corrupts"?

One of the recurring themes in this critical re-examination of the conditions of life in a post-capitalist society concerns the question of political power. And no wonder! For the Stalinist abuses of power were only too evident in the past.

The hypothesis that power itself is the root of the trouble has been advanced from various quarters. It appears in the novel *Ako chuti moc* (1967; The Taste of Power), by the Slovak writer Ladislav Mňačko (b. 1919), which tells—through the eyes of a dead politician's photographer friend—the story of a famous political figure who is about to be given a state funeral. In an imaginary conversation with his dead friend, the photographer ends up with self-contradictory answers. He concludes first: "*Power*, my friend, *is neither good nor bad in itself*—it depends on the man and how he uses it." And he goes on to say (speaking of himself in the third person):

> He asks himself whether you are to be pitied and he replies, No, no one is to be pitied who has shaped his own destiny. You were free to shape yours as you did, but you might have chosen otherwise. The road you took is a hard one, perhaps the hardest—that of immense endeavour ending in nothingness. Your sleepless friend here can think of only one answer to his question, and that an inadequate one. Power *corrupts.*[20]

The answer is indeed inadequate. "Power" is an immensely complex set of institutions—i.e. a whole *system* of interrelated power structures—in which the possible role of any particular individual is strictly limited. There is no such thing as "political power in general" (save as a philosophical abstraction), only historically concrete systems of power that can be assessed and evaluated as "good" or "bad" in this or that respect. Nor is it true that the nature of power "depends on the man and how he uses it": it depends only partly on him. It is therefore a harsh and rather cruel judgment that "no one is to be pitied who has shaped his own destiny," because he "might have chosen otherwise." The world of human tragedy is this world right here, with all its dilemmas, conflicts, and systems of power, and not the "might-have-been" world of gratuitous fiction. In the real world we have to learn to live with "power," by restructuring its systems in relation to specific human ends. That is why the peevish conclusion, "Power corrupts," is bound to sound hollow.

Mňačko fails to question the *system* of power; he prefers to put forward an individualistic hypothesis that can be harmonized with the official explanation of the "distortions" due to an alleged "personality cult." Mňačko is in fact excusing himself in his depiction of the writer-photographer as a critical outsider and yet a close friend of the "fearless eagle"; for he had been one of the worst dogmatists of the now denounced era. The artistic consequences of this classic example of bad faith—in its Sartrean sense—are disastrous. All social problems are "psychologized" and rendered in the end meaningless by being turned, in the course of their psychologistic reductions, into unintended caricatures. Instead of convincing characterizations we get schematic assertions:

> As Galovitch [the dead man's political rival] concluded his speech, Frank [the photographer] felt pity for the dead man. Of course,

> there was much for which he was to blame. He had destroyed public confidence, not only in himself but in the social system he represented and the movement in which he had grown to manhood. He had frustrated the hopes placed in him. He had committed many base actions, abused power that did not belong to him alone, brought sorrow and misfortune to many; but all these were in a sense *natural human failings.* His motives might have been impure, his impulses and actions unworthy, but they were those of a fallible human being.[21]

By contrast the hero's adversary Galovitch "was infallible. Throughout his period of office he had never made any mistake. He was *a monster of absolute morality, without weakness or passion*, perhaps without desires of any kind." Yet, contradicting the banally obvious intent of this schematic contrast, Mňačko adds: "Frank was not seeking to justify him [the dead man] but only to explain, to understand."

Thus, in place of convincing literary representation the reader is simply *told* what meaning he is expected to derive from the bewildering patchwork of schematic assertions and disconnected anecdotal illustrations. The characters are paper figures, carrying no weight or power of persuasion. It is only *declared* that the dead man used to be a "fearless eagle," a "born leader," and so on, but there is nothing that could artistically support these statements. The flash-back episodes, told by the narrator, are mostly concerned with the trivia of the dead man's sexual life—depicted in a crudely naturalistic fashion—from which it is impossible to squeeze out even the barest outlines of a "public hero."

This artistic failure has its inner logic. The lack of humanly significant literary substance carries with it the necessity of arbitrary interventions at all stages of characterization. The way in which the hollow central figure is invented anticipates the human environment into which such a character can be inserted: Galovitch is merely "deduced" from the schematic hero by means of a negative inversion of his abstract attributes. (This is why Galovitch must be "a monster of absolute morality," and so on.) Indeed, the schematic principle of composition produces not only the grotesque figure of a Galovitch but also the equally grotesque imposition of the latter's abstractly negative qualities on people around him. Thus, Galovitch's wife cannot be simply a human being in her own right, but must be described as "a stout, dumpy, rather stupid woman, whom hardly anyone had met. Frank had seen her perhaps four or five times in the course of his career. No one took any interest in her: it seemed irrelevant whether Galovitch was married or not—his private life was unknown, unimportant, uninteresting."[22] By contrast the dead man—a "stallion"—is, of course, surrounded by most attractive women (Margaret, Judith, The Blonde, Lisa), and every one of them is also the object of Frank's burning desires: a device of identification with the hero that, instead of succeeding in its mystificatory function, ironically highlights the writer's "bad faith" mentioned above.

The abstract quality of Mňačko's ideological conception, the hollow schematism of his artistic vision, and the crude naturalism of his representation are closely interconnected. This combination of literary ingredients is familiar from the Stalinist era; only the theses have changed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the search for an answer to the questions asked by many intellectuals in eastern European countries today is not advanced by this approach.

The Ideological Background

The relationship between literature and the party was defined by Lenin in the following passage of his paper on "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905):

> In contradistinction to bourgeois customs, to the profit-making, commercialized bourgeois press, to bourgeois literary careerism and individualism, "aristocratic anarchism," and drive for profit, the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of *party literature*, must develop this principle and put it into practice as fully and completely as possible. What is this principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary Supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organized, planned, and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.[23]

How should one interpret these lines—written before the revolution—at a time when the party is in control of society? Some people have suggested that what Lenin had in mind was political and theoretical writing rather than creative literature,[24] to which very different considerations should apply. A closer examination of Lenin's text, however, refutes this hypothesis. For he refers, unmistakably, to the issue of the "freedom of literary creation," emphasizing that "there is no question that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question, either, that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and phantasy, form and content."[25] And his conclusion is that, although no mechanical control is admissible, the principle of "party literature" must apply to the field of creative literature too.

Yet no one can deny that the conquest of power introduces new complications. In 1905 the problem was to define the orientation of those writers who *wanted* to belong to the party; after the revolution every intellectual—whether he wanted it or not—became subject to the decisions of the party. This is why Lenin insisted in the post-revolutionary period on the necessity of a non-sectarian approach to the complexities of the new situation and on the task of positively assimilating all that is valuable in the cultural heritage of mankind. He did not, however, explain how to apply in practice these two apparently contradictory principles: (i) the socialist transformation of culture, "the development of a genuine proletarian culture"[26]; and (ii) the adoption and adaptation of all the valuable features of the culture of the non-proletarian classes. (The Zhdanovian solution later was to suppress the second of these principles and simply enforce the principles of "Socialist Realism" and "Revolutionary Romanticism.")

To what extent is there an *aesthetic* contradiction involved in the principle of subordinating literature to politics, i.e. to the control of the party? In his interpretation of Lenin's principle Mao Tse-tung raised this question and made some important qualifications:

(i) "There is . . . no such thing as art for art's sake . . . or art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole *proletarian revolutionary cause.*" By implication literature and art are subordinate to the party only in so far as the latter is and remains a genuine embodiment of the "proletarian revolutionary *cause.*" (By contrast, in Lenin's text the expression "common cause of the proletariat"—of which literature *must become* a part—may be taken to mean the party itself.)

(ii) "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics . . . they are *indispensable* cogs and wheels in the whole machine, an *indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause.* If we had no literature and art even in the broadest and most ordinary sense, *we could not carry on the revolutionary movement and win victory.*" Consequently, the concept of "subordination" applies only to the phase of the most immediate and urgent tasks (literature and art are, in this respect, "less urgent," as Mao Tse-tung puts it), and must be replaced by the concept of "indispensability" in the machine as a whole, considered from the point of view of the full realization of the comprehensive tasks of the "proletarian revolutionary cause."

(iii) The politics in question are "the politics of the masses, not the politics of a few so-called statesmen . . . who work behind closed doors and *fancy they have a monopoly of wisdom*. . . . This is precisely why there can be complete unity between the political character of our literary and artistic works and their *truthfulness*."[27] By implication, the bureaucratization of socialist politics, the practice of working "behind closed doors" and claiming a "monopoly of wisdom," destroys the relationship between literature and politics. Art and literature that submit to the directives of bureaucratized, sectarian politics cease to have the aesthetically all-important quality of "truthfulness." Thus the aesthetic contradiction, which results when the political movement goes astray, cannot be resolved by aesthetic means, but only by a far-reaching socialist transformation of the entire political sphere.

Needless to say, these problems could not be formulated in this way in countries where Stalinism—or in cultural matters Zhdanovism—prevailed. Lukács—who in the 1930s in the Soviet Union and after the war in Hungary tried to challenge the principles of official cultural policy—had to operate at the level of aesthetic criticism. His own aesthetic argument compelled him to assume a very ambiguous position in relation to Lenin's principle of *Parteilichkeit* (party literature) and *partiinost'* (partisanship). He could not directly challenge the validity of the political directives themselves as formulated in relation to literature, let alone the nature of the kind of politics from which such directives arose, and therefore his defence of "aesthetically valid literary creation" had to take the line of questioning the applicability of political tasks to literature in general. He insisted that, in the sense in which one can legitimately apply the criterion of *Parteilichkeit* to literature, *partiinost'* is not confined to the present: "Thus Lessing, Shelley, and even Heine are party poets without a party."[28] And he added:

> It is by no means accidental that the great majority of political writers in the strict sense of the term, i.e. party writers, are lyric poets. Of course one can find among them dramatists too, like Lessing, the young Schiller, Beaumarchais, or novelists, like Saltykov-Shchedrin. However, the lyric form remains the most natural, the most homogeneous form of expression of party literature. The objective forms, the drama and the epic, resist the direct expression of the writer's conviction. In cases in which a great political tem-

> perament like the young Schiller subdues this resistance, the result may sometimes be the enlargement of the form, but often it is the explosion of the form.[29]

There is, however, another sense of *Parteilichkeit*, which Lukács applies to literature in general: "a humanistic tendency—active in all great writers: a struggle for the complete, fully developed man."[30] Thus, Lukács extends Lenin's principle of *Parteilichkeit* in order to counteract its narrow political applications in the service of official cultural policy. (He maintains the same position, in a chapter on *Parteilichkeit*, in his book *Über die Besonderheit als Kategorie der Ästhetik* [On Peculiarity as an Aesthetic Category],[31] for which he was attacked by one of the party leaders, József Révai,[32] in 1950.) Lukács' literary heroes are writers such as Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy, and Thomas Mann, who represent the "intermediary type" between those who cannot really get involved in the political processes of their society even if they want to (his example is Mihály Babits[33]) and the great "people's tribunes" of poetry, such as Petőfi and Ady. This "intermediary type" of writer "fights for the progress and development of humanity by revealing, in accordance with the inherent possibilities of literature, the road of this progress, its moving forces, and the external and internal powers that oppose themselves to this development. A true and faithful reflection of society is here the principal way of influencing people."[34] Moreover, even as regards revolutionary poetry, Lukács suggests that the appropriate model for the relationship between the party and the writer is the "partisan" or "guerilla"[35] who acts on his own initiative within the broad framework of the cause for which he fights.

Undoubtedly there was some abstract truth in Révai's criticism of Lukács. "To what use," asked Révai, "could our Hungarian literature put Lukács' slogan of 1945: not Zola but Balzac? And what could it do with his slogan of 1948: not Pirandello and Priestley but Shakespeare and Molière?"[36] (And later he could have questioned in the same way Lukács' thesis of 1956: not Kafka but Thomas Mann.) If one expected from literature direct political agitation—an expectation unmistakably expressed in Révai's principle that critics ought to encourage writers who "represent, *well or badly*, the development toward Socialist Realism"[37]—Lukács' aesthetic advice was of no use whatsoever. Révai's relative merit lay in his perception that the central issue was not aesthetic but political; on the other hand, he did not question the policies of Stalin. Lukács did, but he tried to express his opposition by seizing on contradictions in the official cultural policy. For instance, realism and objectivity were clearly not virtues that Stalinism either exemplified or encouraged; and indeed, in cultural policy, "Revolutionary Romanticism" was the ideal. At the same time, however, "Socialist Realism" was still recommended and hoped for. Just as Stalin would have liked his policies to have been realized without the troubles that were necessarily inherent in their subjectivism, so Révai would have welcomed the literary exemplification of the general Stalinist perspectives by means of powerful realist works. This is why in the end he turned, theoretically, against "drama-without-conflict" while at the same time the practical impact of his cultural policy as a whole was the encouragement of literary efforts that were in closest affinity with "drama-without-conflict." This contradiction was internal and insoluble. Paradoxically and fortunately, however, it also provided a margin of action for intellectuals such as Lukács and Déry, who insisted that the principle of "well or badly" ought to be replaced by the recognition that genuine socialist aims in literature cannot be accomplished by issuing voluntaristic bureaucratic directives.

Déry's Conflicts

Tibor Déry (b. 1894) has been the target of many attacks and controversies throughout his life.[38] As a young writer he rebelled against the inhumanities of the established social order and joined the Hungarian Communist Party shortly after its foundation. During the Councils Republic of 1919 he was a member of the Writers' Directorium, and he had to flee the country after the victory of Admiral Horthy's counterrevolution. He spent several years in exile, and even when he finally returned to Hungary he had to live anonymously. Although his reputation as a writer was high—thanks primarily to the underground influence of his manuscripts—his major works could not be published. He had to earn his living by translations, and after his imprisonment for translating Gide's book on the Soviet Union, *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* (1936)—deemed "subversive activity" by Horthy judges—he had to do even this work under pseudonyms or under the names of his friends. His great trilogy *A befejezetlen mondat* (The Unfinished Sentence), written between 1932 and 1936, could see the light of day only after the war.

He came under fire again, this time from party sectarians, almost immediately after the publication of his works,[39] but for years he could dismiss these attacks as peripheral. He had powerful intellectual allies, such as Lukács and at times even Révai, for reasons already mentioned.

Déry paid little attention to the literary-political attacks so long as he could identify himself with the general perspectives of post-war social development. His writing between 1945 and 1951, in contrast with his works written prior to 1945, became serene and optimistic in its general outlook.

The change can be clearly seen in the radical structural differences between his two monumental cyclic novels, *A befejezetlen mondat* and *Felelet* (The Reply). The structure of the first reveals a conflict between the writer's despair at the suffocating atmosphere of the society he is depicting and his rather abstract hope for the future. Accordingly, the static element finally predominates in this trilogy, despite Déry's effort to show the development of his central characters from their early childhood. The treatment of a basic structural factor, time, is highly significant in *A befejezetlen mondat*. It appears to be arbitrary and devoid of direction: the writer seems to jump from one situation to another, from one period to another, backward and forward, instead of following a straightforward linear pattern. A closer look, however, proves that Déry's trilogy is in fact rigorously composed; particular details are illuminated by the writer in the order demanded by the general moral conception of the work. We are confronted finally with a comprehensive image of life under Hungarian capitalism, with all its paralysing inhumanity, so that we cannot help morally condemning this state of affairs. Everything in the end points to the necessity of rebellion, even if the impression we have of it is rather abstract, due to the moralistic character of some of the conflicts and situations that Déry presents. *A befejezetlen mondat* represents the totality of Hungarian society from the standpoint of an anticipated "completion" of the "unfinished sentence": a completion deemed inescapable by the writer as a matter of moral necessity, even though the concrete socio-political trends he himself depicts do not support his faith; we see no signs of actual progress or historical necessity. No wonder, therefore, that the static element predominates in this work.

Felelet, by contrast, is characterized by the clarity and simplicity of its style and composition. Conceived in 1947–8, it investigates the human problems of Hungarian social development in the period 1928–48, and envisages a significant climax in the nationalizations of 1948, which were supposed to mark a major step toward Socialism. Déry obviously intended to reformulate the human and social problems that he had left open in *A befejezetlen mondat* in the hope of finding an answer to them in the positive perspective of *Felelet*. But only two volumes out of the planned four were completed, and the whole project was abandoned after the violent attacks that followed the publication of the second volume. In November 1956 Déry commented bitterly:

> In 1945 I believed that workers, peasants, all of us who had been excluded from the nation, would find a new country. But during the past ten years the country has been stolen inch by inch from under our feet. We thought we should be able to build Socialism; instead of which they put us behind prison walls built of blood and lies. I feel responsible, too, because my eyes were opened late. And when they were opened I could not strengthen my voice or my silence to such an extent that all should understand their meaning.[40]

Clearly, *Felelet* could no longer be brought to an artistically satisfactory conclusion, even had it been possible politically. (In 1957 Déry was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, but was released after serving four. In recent years he has been able to publish his novels, short stories, and memoirs freely, but his post-1956 works unmistakably display his profound artistic and political crisis.)

Around 1947–8, Déry was by no means the only Hungarian writer to adopt a disproportionately optimistic perspective in his writing. In 1947 Gyula Illyés (b. 1902), the greatest living representative of Hungarian Populism, expressed his enthusiasm for the social transformations of those days in an article entitled "Az író öröme" (The Writer's Joy):

> These developments one can depict only in a novel—and what a novel it could be!—not in transcendental reflections; not by means of a Proustian theory of time; but in a novel dense with events, in a *roman fleuve* of 30 volumes without an interruption. I live in a Balzacian world, and at last I can see men; and through them I see the law that forms and transforms them. I have only to depict them and the work of art is already born.

Some of Illyés's finest works were written in this over-optimistic mood, just as the two volumes of *Felelet* give a more dynamic and realistic picture of pre-war Hungarian society than *A befejezetlen mondat*, even though their author was so soon to become disillusioned. (Illyés, too, became disenchanted with his poem "A statisztika kertben" [In the Park of the Institute of Statistics][41] but it remains a powerful and suggestive work.) The fact is that the long-range perspectives that the events immediately after the war opened up to Hungarian writers had a more profound validity, both imaginative and political, than subsequent twists and turns of political fortune.

In Déry's development the phase that immediately followed *Felelet* was characterized by the writer's efforts to defend his right to be "apolitical," if his subject required it. When Révai declared that in socialist literature there is no place for either tragedies or idylls,[42] Déry wrote an "idyllic" novella, *Simon Menyhért születése* (The Birth of Menyhért Simon), that challenged Révai's dogmatic principle. He also defended the young hero of *Felelet*, Bálint Köpe, by saying: "I aimed at representing a horse; they censure me for not having produced a lion."[43] These were defensive moves: protests against the interference of politics in literature. They reflected a situation in which many writers did not directly question the nature of the political developments themselves: they tended to accept the party's authority in general political matters. This phase came to a close with the revelations of the false trials, which generated a profound crisis among intellectuals. From that time onward Déry pressed for the author's right to be actively involved in politics in order to help prevent similar inhumanities in the future.

In this spirit his *Niki*,[44] originally planned as an "idyll," turned into a politically outspoken account of the grave human conflicts and tragedies of the immediate past. And in his memoirs, *Nincs itélet* (There is No Judgment), Déry is explicit that the writer's role is to stay always in opposition:

> Today, as ever since the beginning of my road as a writer, I believe that the artist's place is *in hell*. He is assigned that place by *nature* and by *society*. If the latter forgets to send him to hell the writer himself creates his own hell. He is of no use to mankind unless he addresses it from hell. Even the apparently acquiescent artist who praises the beauty of life differs only in method from the openly oppositional writer: by focussing attention on a model he generates justifiable envy and discontent . . . the role of *opposition* is not only *natural* for the artist in the games of both nature and society, it is also obligatory for him. His work gets corrupted the moment he abandons his role of opposition, or indeed when he is forced to abandon it. If there is some worth in my work it must be my instinctive faithfulness to this opposition, even in those happy few years of agreement that for me followed 1945.[45]

We cannot fail to detect a touch of despair in Déry's words: all the more because now "nature," too, is invoked to explain the writer's bitter fate. And yet, despite all his self-torturing irony and heart-searching scepticism, despair does not prevail in Déry's latest works. In his poetic dialogue with Gyula Illyés he writes:

> Let us throw aside hope and hopelessness alike and let us get on with our work. . . . Let us make peace with today's day in order to

> reach the day of tomorrow, for the road even to tomorrow is long enough. True, for such peace we need more strength, courage, and inventiveness than for the flights to the planets.[46]

By rejecting "hope and hopelessness alike," Déry achieves a kind of down-to-earth, day-to-day working hope without which he could not speak of "the day of tomorrow." This is why his poetic dialogue with Illyés on the fate of mankind can end on a hopeful note after reflecting on the worst horrors that have happened or may still come. The deeply depressing perspective of Déry's fantastic novel, *G. A. Úr X-ben* (Mr A. G. in X)—a work written in jail—remains an episode in his *œuvre*. It shows the interchangeability and desolation of boundless optimism and pessimism alike, but can discover no way of transcending them. His next novel, *A kiközösítő* (1966; The Excommunicator), the story of St Ambrose, goes a great deal further, by contrasting the doubts and scepticism of a life dedicated to a cause with the normality and vitality of a fully lived life. Déry employs a fine and balanced irony, a vehicle that carries the theme well, unlike the self-defeatingly heavy and often one-sided irony of *G. A. Úr X-ben*. For some time it even seemed to Déry that with *A kiközösíto* he had brought his *œuvre* to an artistic climax and conclusion.[47]

Déry's memoirs are, significantly enough, in several ways similar to his *A befejezetlen mondat*. In the absence of a discernible chronology—a most unusual feature in memoir literature—characters and situations emerge and disappear in an apparently arbitrary associational way. But here again, a closer look reveals a rigorous structure. *Nincs ítélet* is Déry's first attempt since *Felelet* to come to grips on a comprehensive scale with the problems and dilemmas of the contemporary world; here he is searching for those values and human energies that point in a positive way in the direction of "the day of tomorrow," notwithstanding all the tragedies of "the day of yesterday and today." As in *A befejezetlen mondat* the accent is on the tormented artist's vision of contemporary man: his conflicts and failings, doubts and dilemmas, hopes and despair. Here, too, the static element predominates, and even the anticipations of a more distant future, characteristic of *A befejezetlen mondat*, are banished from the picture. In many passages in which the writer speaks in the first person the atmosphere is depressing and pessimistic. The memoirs are full of moralizing (often extremely problematical moralizing) references to "nature": a kind of refuge from the powerlessness the writer feels in the face of impersonal social trends. But there are also important correctives at work; what makes Déry's achievement possible is the perspective of a "tangible future" (only one step ahead of the present), illumined by the "working hope" that we have already noted. This structures Déry's memoirs all the time, even when some of his explicit moralizing remarks might seem to suggest the contrary. The other corrective is the artistically gratifying depiction of characters such as Attila József and Andor Gábor, whose unshakable socialist view of the world is in sharp contrast with the creed Déry professes today: yet his powers of realism enable him to integrate them into his work. Thus, the horizons of the memoirs are significantly enlarged. In the end his faith is shown to be badly shaken, but by no means broken or destroyed.

The Younger Generation

Those who matured as writers after the war could identify with the transformation of Hungarian society more readily even than Déry; but when the crisis came, about 1952, they were more defenceless than their elders. Their earlier enthusiasm was shattered when the false trials became known: they felt betrayed in their unquestioning faith and dedication. Déry was accused of "bourgeois allegiances," of inability to detach himself from his "decadent experiences," of unwillingness to give up his "bourgeois individualism and separatism," and of refusal to turn his back on the "relics of the past." Prefabricated criticisms of this kind, however, could not be applied to the younger generation. Their crisis and later revolt could not be simply brushed aside by labelling them, like Déry, as "fellow-travellers *within* the party, tied to the values of the past." Besides, condemning the younger generation in such terms would have left the official cultural policy without any representatives of its principles in their literary practice, good or bad.

Needless to say, different writers reacted in different ways to the crisis. Some fell by the wayside and ceased to exist altogether as writers. Others, in their disappointment, withdrew more and more into a private world, dissipating their talent in largely epigonistic formal experiments, which more often than not lagged decades behind their models in Western *avant-garde* literature. But the best of them came out of this crisis better writers, in every sense of the word, than they were before.

László Benjámin (b. 1915), one of Hungary's outstanding living poets, was less than 30 when the war was over, with 15 years of hard experience behind him, acquired while working in various kinds of factories from his early youth. No poet has submitted post-war events to a more searching and dramatic examination, starting with a post-mortem on his own share of responsibility. Although sometimes, in the course of this agonizing search, his voice has been overwhelmed by crying despair, his answers in their integrity transcend, in an aesthetically powerful and humanly convincing way, final despair and resignation. This can be clearly seen in his poem "Vérző zászlók alatt" (1962; Under Bleeding Banners), for instance, from which we cannot quote, unfortunately, more than a few verses:

> How senseless the pride cursed with power;
> unseeing, undeedful, self-willed,
> it rouses the rage of the lion
> and cares not whose blood might be spilled—
> nor do the enraged stop to think whom they storm at
> unsure of the part to be filled.
>
> Who is right? Who is not? Who the victim?
> In the grave they all lie side by side.
> The general weal?—it has gone to pieces,
> everyone for himself in the fight;
> and blood and more blood is the answer
> again, for the tongues are all tied.
>
> Though accused and accuser
> and witness I am, all the same,
> in this suit to the right of sentence
> I may not lay any claim—
> But mine is this life in its fullness,
> I would start it all again. . . .
>
> The flowers, the future . . . how odd an equation;
> what the eyes report is so baffling to the brain;
> but deep in my heart the old faith is awakened,
> the boy's hopes can't be all past reclaim!
> And whether it ends in the shade of the laurel
> or right in the devil's domain,
> this life must be lived in its fullness.
> I will start it all again![48]

Thus Benjámin's perspectives, despite all the inhumanities of the recent past whose nature he knows full well, remain the values of a socialist mankind. The same perspectives structure the novels and short stories of a considerably younger writer of great satirical talent, György Moldova (b. 1934). He paints a devastating picture of a bureaucratized society, in which corruption, theft, servility, careerism, political opportunism, and crude selfishness hide behind a mask of collectivistic slogan-mongering. In one short novel, entitled *Az elátkozott hivatal* (1967; The Cursed Office), none of the employees dares to break the silence during the one-minute tribute to the just-deceased omnipotent boss because they are dominated by an irrational fear of what might happen to the blasphemous first mover or talker; and so they all stay still and silent for ever and ever. In another story, entitled *Gumikutya* (1967; The Rubber Dog), a factory is not only dismantled and stolen bit by bit, to the last bolt, under the supervision of its director and with the complicity of many people, on the site and in far-away offices; it also continues to lead a fictitious existence as a "model" factory on the basis of phoney statistics. Moldova pinpoints in a dialogue between Director Noch and the Lady Professor, his secretary, one of the most powerful of the mechanisms that keep the whole system of abuses going:

> "What do you think, Mr Noch: isn't there going to be a scandal if Balaskó [the employee who has resisted attempts to corrupt him] really reveals that the factory has been stolen?"
>
> Noch, with a leisurely gesture, shook the ash off his cigar.
>
> "No."
>
> "How do you know? So far we have managed to buy off every one of our difficult customers."
>
> "The logic of it is really very simple, Lady Professor. There are two possibilities. First: the authorities do not believe Balaskó's story, but he goes on and on, insisting that it is true until he is locked up in a lunatic asylum. The second: they believe his story at once, and they immediately shut him up in a madhouse, if not in a jail. No matter how overcrowded these institutions might be at present, they will find in one of them a free plank-bed for him all right."
>
> Miss Momentán looked puzzled at her boss.
>
> "Why would they do that?"
>
> "Because Balaskó represents a danger also for them. It is obvious that if there is a scandal, it will hurt them much more than myself, in case it gets known that they worked so unconscientiously that one could steal without difficulty entire factories from under their noses."
>
> "But what happens if these offices confess their shortcomings and failings?"
>
> "That is out of the question, Lady Professor. The Office knows very well that the moment it confesses its first fault the others come out into the broad daylight and the chain necessarily leads to demonstrating the total superfluity of the office's existence. And an office can admit anything but that."
>
> Noch put his cigar out and continued.
>
> "The office, Lady Professor, can always outlive the range of tasks for which it had been originally created, and its power and caste-consciousness grow in direct proportion with its increasing superfluity and futility. This is our real fortune, Lady Professor."[49]

Balaskó does succeed in bringing the scandal out into the open and puts up a determined fight against the menacing crowd of those who were actively involved in the big swindle. Of course, Moldova's artistic integrity prevents him from making us believe that the outcome simply will be a victory for his hero. But the novel ends on a hopeful note; and in any case, one can see quite clearly the line of action he advocates in order to realize the socialist values he believes in.

The situation of peasantry-orientated writers is different in significant ways. The following quotation is characteristic of the mood in which many younger populist writers find themselves today:

> This book shows that evil can only temporarily rule man; it cannot definitively triumph over him. . . . Man is born good, and in order to be able to act rightfully—in other words: to stay good—all he has to do is to listen to his own conscience, which is unfailingly capable of distinguishing the good from the evil. We do not need any additional help for an honest life. This miracle—our conscience—is capable of weighing up instantaneously and in the necessary moment every detail, every relation, every aspect of a human situation, and supplying man, within an infinitesimal fraction of a second, with the required answer as regards the rightful course of action.

The quotation is not from a textbook on Kantian ethics, but from a presentation of Ferenc Sánta's novel *Az ötödik pecsét* (1967; The Fifth Seal) by the writer himself. This kind of literature continues to employ traditional concepts such as "man," "goodness," "spirit," "hope," and so on. Ferenc Juhász (b. 1928), for instance—who is, with László Nagy (b. 1925), his friend and fellow lyrist, the outstanding Hungarian populist poet of the younger generation—introduces with these words his volume of selected poems: "[This volume] should testify that I loved life very much, that I believed in infinity, and that I tried to spell out the Law, for the glory of Being and for the good of man."[50] And he formulates his poetic creed as follows:

> . . . there are laws, inner commands, and obligations that the poet must proclaim and abide by. The poet must tell all about the universe (every one according to his knowledge, passion, and impulse) and he must love Being because Being is lonely and worthy of love. The poet must protest, incessantly, against stupidity, pride, arbitrariness, tyranny, oppression, and exploitation, in the name of human dignity and honesty; and he should never stop emphasizing that the only sense of human life is liberty. And that nobody has the right to deprive of it the particular individual, a nation, or mankind in general. The poet must love man, because this is the most beautiful of all human tasks, and he must do everything for man's elevation. The poet produces through his work the most mysterious

> and most severe form of human self-knowledge and of the knowledge of Being. And mankind is in great need of self-knowledge. This is why poetry will survive, for mankind.[51]

Not surprisingly, political themes appear in this poetry only where they are linked to mankind or to some fundamental existential problem, often shrouded in apocalyptic vision. There is no mysticism in it, but a kind of pantheistic reverence is evident in the imagery. Its negative structuring principle is a strong scepticism toward history. Social issues tend to be transferred to a general plane: the compositional tensions and developments go, as a rule, from the particular toward questions of universal Being.

By contrast, the proletarian-socialist-orientated writers are intensely concerned with the complexities of the historical past, which they examine in concrete terms in order to find answers to the problems of the present. To them it is not history as such that is problematical, but a specific socio-historical development that produced the inhumanities from which they themselves have suffered. In their view, if there is hope it cannot be in "hope" itself, nor in blind "faith" or any kind of imperative, but must be derived from a concrete understanding of what went wrong and why. The poet and dramatist István Eörsi (b. 1931), sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in 1957, clearly shows this concern in his sonnet "Lenin, 1922"[52]:

> World-revolution, his greatest hope,
> this time it did not come.
> But the frost has arrived again;
> the baby chews rags, his mother feeds on bark.
>
> At least one could paint animals on this landscape
> spotted with dead and refuse.
> The people, somewhat feudal, waits:
> waits—for the want of better—for a Messiah.
>
> Where even the little there is would run away,
> the Office's power fills the need
> of bringing order to disarray.
>
> And there is no turning back. This gigantic risk is
> a foothold of the world's revolution which—
> though in other ways—must be brought to its end.

Notwithstanding the fate personally suffered by the poet, the perspectives remain socialist.

Lengyel's "Tragédie humaine"

József Lengyel's road to creative literature was a long and immensely hard odyssey. Between 1937 and 1955 Lengyel (1896–1975) spent 18 years in Siberian concentration camps and under surveillance. It is this tremendous experience, which he suffered and conquered, that made him into a truly representative writer of our age.

His earlier writing was full of promise, awaiting fulfilment. Looking back on it in *Elejétől végig* (1961; From Beginning to End), he explains its shortcomings:

> In the 20 years that followed [the 1919 revolution] I wrote on bread and breadwinning, on daily cares and daily bread. I wrote on wheat-growing, on the gap between industrial and agricultural prices, on the depression—where there is no bread in one place and too much bread in another—producing unemployment and hunger in both. I wrote about bread on which greedy capitalists poured petrol, about coffee that they dumped into the sea. I wrote much and perhaps not too badly, for I had the power of conviction. What I wrote was not untruthful and my feeling of revolt was genuine. But I was unable to see bread in its tangible corporeal reality. Not even when my own daily bread was in question, as often enough it was. I lived in a world of abstractions.[53]

His arrest in 1937 brought Lengyel cruelly back to reality.

In Lengyel's work as a whole we see a coherent attempt at a synthesis. Admittedly, its form is peculiar: it is by no means that of the more traditional monumental epic forms. But the individual literary pieces are organized and structured by a comprehensive search for answers to some central questions: "How was it possible?" "What is the meaning of it all?" "Is there a solution in sight?" This complex of problems common to Lengyel's works and the general perspectives within which he assesses them make possible a *cyclic* arrangement and composition: the reappearance of some central characters in different stories, in different situations and periods of time.

The compositional principle of Lengyel's novella cycles is not that of a contemporary *comédie humaine* (such as Illyés had prophesied). It is, rather, a kind of *tragédie humaine*. Lengyel shows human beings in dramatically heightened situations in which they either succeed in finding in themselves, through their interactions with their fellow-men, those human energies of tragic intensity that enable them to face up to all crises, however grave, even at the price of death, or else their humanity suffers, becomes degraded, or indeed perishes, although they themselves may physically survive.

Yet even an individual's failure to respond in a humanly adequate way to the prevailing historical trends is represented as part of a collective tragedy. A sad example is the criminal hooligan Sasha who robs and even kills people—and in the end gets killed himself, at the hands of the security forces, while on the run—but also gives a helping hand to others in need. Commenting on his fate, Lengyel writes:

> It was he who took my hand, helped me up into the van. Otherwise I should still be lying on the concrete floor of the waiting room, maybe. I, if anyone, should deplore Sasha's ugly and senseless end. Does he deserve no better fate? Of course not. *But why must there be this kind of life, this kind of fate, which then deserves no better end?* Whom shall I accuse? The man himself? Or God who lets it happen? *Or a society in which such a thing is possible?* Or human nature? Or the old *stanichnik*, who was ready to serve him from the start? Or myself, withdrawing, yet making use of the shelter?[54]

It is a prisoner, just released, who tells this story, and as he reflects on the people who represented a ray of hope in the course of his terrible experience, he adds: "Poor Sasha, may you rest in peace too."[55]

Lengyel has turned to the larger forms of literature only after thoroughly exploring the ground of a possible future epic synthesis in his novella cycles. The representation of characters in these cycles is extremely sparing. We see only those sides of their personality that are in the closest relationship with the dramatically heightened central themes. Personal idiosyncrasies are depicted only in situations of "normality," namely, those that preceded the precipitating tragedy of mass arrests.[56] Thereafter we witness a "converging metamorphosis" of characters, all in the same direction: a kind of "sameness" required by the extremity of the situations. For only one kind of response can achieve the human survival that is the central message of Lengyel's writings. Thus, the technique of character-development in these writings puts sharply into focus the bare essentials, and pushes into the background—structurally toward the periphery—all purely personal, individual features. When a situation of relative normality appears again—life under surveillance in a remote corner of Siberia, instead of in a concentration camp—and memories of the past more naturally stream forward, even then Lengyel stresses those features of human existence that represent the bare core of survival. This is how the man under surveillance in Siberia is represented:

> Once a spoilt child, then the pride of the University, and later still a so-called brilliant talent and outstanding engineer, flooded with all kinds of distinction and recognition. But all this now appears

> ridiculous and lyingly remote. The real joy is to eat bread actually earned with the work of his own hands. There is some romanticism in this resignation; also a great deal of pride, and some kind of moralizing rationalization of the unalterable, forced upon him by his situation. But all this helps living. Also, he knows very well that he is an engineer no longer. He knows that he forgets and also that even the knowledge he once had would be too little today. "I am receding, in the sense of a multiplication, or perhaps even exponentially,"—he said to himself several times, when he was thinking of his old job. "Today I could do no more than sharpen saws in the summer and mend scythes with a hammer in the winter." This insight struck him as an axe-blow on his nape. For the bowed head cannot receive blows on its forehead. . . . But he was alive, he wanted to live, and he observed with envy that here, where he lived, where one had to go out even in 50 degrees of frost, every young man, every driver, feller, stableman, or herdsman was worth more than him.[57]

In a world of such severity, nature appears as a mortal menace to man, an ally of those who expose the condemned to immense hardship. Even the beauty of nature may be unbearable, because it is a reminder of the worst dehumanization, like the field of yellow poppies feeding themselves on the mass grave of a liquidation camp.[58] But this kind of response, although humanly and artistically authentic as the necessary response of man crippled by the cruel circumstances of his life, would be a distortion in a work that aimed at a comprehensive epic representation of reality. The story-teller must first "make his peace with nature"—as Lengyel does, toward the end of *Reggeltől estig* (1961; From Morning to Evening) and in the beautifully moving novella *Igéző* (1961; The Spell)—before he can resume his inquiry on a more comprehensive scale.

Also, he must link the phenomenon of camp existence to the totality of society, in all its historical complexity. To start with, he insists on the irrational breakdown of social relations. Talking about the persecuted, he emphasizes that among them there were "all kinds of people; some guilty, others not guilty. Some of them never committed an offence, others only a few days ago were themselves responsible for the persecution of innocent people. But the innocent ones were not brought in because of their innocence; nor were the guilty ones arrested because of their guilt. Many things were incomprehensible then . . . ."[59] Obviously no explanation can be found in the camps themselves; there, the experience of incomprehension and senselessness necessarily dominates, until at times the whole of human existence appears to be deprived of any meaning. The point of these episodes is to search for the indestructible core of human life, for "humanity in the midst of inhumanity." Against such a background the hollowness of utopian-transcendental conceptions of life's meaning is self-evident, just as the matter-of-fact humanism of Lengyel's newly found sense of life is also self-evident. "But all in all, I am contented, because I was sent to die, and here I am, alive. To live, even if it makes no sense—this is the deepest sense of life."[60] Humanly to survive against immense odds creates, then, its own sense. But this sense must be inserted into a broader framework so that it can acquire its full value. This is why the engineer must go on with his reflections:

> Even if this strange pine-tree soon loses its needles, in the spring it will come into leaf again. . . . "Come now, the future again . . ."—he says angrily to himself. "In the spring I'll sharpen the saws against the trees. . . . That's how I am useful in this senseless life. The sense of life is that we live. . . ." This is how he encourages himself, without, however, succeeding in winning over his doubts. He senses that solitary life isn't quite life, for life needs joy, too, for its fulfilment. And only for minutes can one know in solitude anything other than death-fearing, trembling selfishness. . . . Death-fearing? There is nothing to fear in death. . . . But only the drunk or the madman can laugh by himself. It is only crying that is good on one's own. He turns his face to the ground, but he doesn't cry. The earth is humid and smells musty. In the autumn warmth the decomposition of last year's forest leaves slowly goes on.[61]

Thus, Lengyel's quest is ultimately for reintegration; he brings together the "senseless exception" of camp life and the "normality" of everyday existence. Both sides must be changed in the process. *Igézö*—a story of "man and dog" that cannot be read without tears—is a classically simple and intense representation of the tragically difficult first steps toward a possible reciprocal integration.

Lengyel identifies the roots of the tragedy of post-revolutionary social developments in the acceptance of an abstractly collectivistic and utopian transcendence in place of an individually tangible, and only then directly meaningful, immanence of a genuine socialist humanism. As this vision emerges, Lengyel's forms tend to become larger and more comprehensive. His dramatic novellas become increasingly populated with sharply defined individual characters; the structural principle, which centred on the bare essentials alone, is reversed. Lengyel explores post-revolutionary history systematically now in search of a more secure foundation for the kind of immanence-orientated future in which he believes. The inner logic of his artistic development is that the tragedy of his middle years should be *aufgehoben* (superseded, preserved) in the monumental epic forms with which he struggled in the last few years.

References

1. See Renato Solmi's penetrating Introduction to WALTER BENJAMIN, *Angelus novus* (Turin 1962), pp. ix–xxxviii.
2. See MAX JACOB, *L'art poétique* (Paris 1922); PIERRE REVERDY, *Le gant de crin* (Paris 1927); A. E. HOUSMAN, *Last Poems* (London 1922), XII; JENNY JOSEPH, "Man in a Bar," in *New Voices*, selected by Alan Pryce-Jones (London 1959).
3. Cf. the role of programmes aiming at linguistic innovation and a revival of national literature in the formation of a politically self-conscious national community.
4. V. I. LENIN, *Collected Works* (Moscow/London 1966), Vol. 31, p. 317.
5. MAO TSE-TUNG, *Selected Works* (Pekin 1965), Vol. III, p. 76.
6. *ibid.*, p. 81.
7. Kuo Mo-jo's volume of poems *Nu Shen* (Goddess) is more a depository of Western influences than an original Chinese achievement; there is, however, undoubted merit in its transplantation of Western idioms into the looser forms of the "new poetry," based on the *payhua* language, in contrast to the traditional, strictly ordered forms of the *venyen* poetic tradition.

   One of the best anthologies of modern Chinese poetry is *Twentieth-Century Chinese Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Kay-yu Hsü (New York 1963).
8. MAO TSE-TUNG, *op. cit.*, p. 96. Lu Hsün's couplet is from "In Mockery of Myself" in *The Collection Outside the Collection*, published in *The Complete Works of Lu Hsün* (Peking 1957), Vol. VII.
9. See, for instance, the masterly analysis of "the problematic individual" and his search for an "integration" in GEORG LUKÁCS, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by A. Bostock (London 1971), written in 1913–4.
10. SERGEI YESENIN, "Cold Moonlight" (1925). All translations are my own except where stated.
11. See his most biting satires, *Klop* (1928–9; The Bedbug) and *Banya* (1929–30; The Bath-house).
12. BORIS PASTERNAK, *Prose and Poems*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London 1959), "Devotion is a Heavy Cross," p. 300.
13. *ibid.*, "You're Here," p. 306.
14. *ibid.*, "Definition of the Soul," p. 263.
15. *ibid.*, "Spasskoye," p. 287.
16. *ibid.*, "Encounter," p. 276.
17. *ibid.*, "We're Few," p. 284.
18. *ibid.*, "Spasskoye," p. 287.
19. *ibid.*, "When I Grow Weary," p. 310.
20. LADISLAV MŇAČKO, *The Taste of Power*, trans. by Paul Stevenson, Preface by Max Hayward (London 1967), p. 218.
21. *ibid.*, p. 228.
22. *ibid.*, p. 230.
23. LENIN, *op cit.*, Vol. 10, p. 45.

24. GEORG LUKÁCS, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by J. and N. Mander (London 1962), pp. 7–8: "Two years ago the Soviet magazine *Drushba Naradov* (1960, No. 4) published a hitherto unknown letter of Krupskaya's, in which she declares that Lenin's famous 1905 essay 'Party Organization and Party Literature' was *not concerned* with *literature as fine art—a view I have long held*. The importance of this statement is considerable, for this essay was the bible of sectarianism in arts during the ideological dictatorship of Stalin and Zhdanov."
25. LENIN, *op. cit.*, Vol. 10, p. 46. See also "Theses on the Problems of Marxist Criticism" (1928), in ANATOLY LUNACHARSKY, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow 1965), pp. 11–27.
26. LENIN, *op. cit.*, Vol. 31, p. 317.
27. MAO TSE-TUNG, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–7.
28. GEORG LUKÁCS, *Irodalom és demokrácia* [Literature and Democracy] (Budapest 1948), p. 120.
29. *ibid.*, p. 122.
30. *ibid.*, p. 121. In *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* [The Specificity of the Aesthetical], 2 vols (Neuwied/Berlin 1963), this idea is developed in great detail in the long concluding chapter, "Die Befreiungskampf der Kunst," Vol. II, pp. 675–872.
31. GEORG LUKÁCS, *Über die Besonderheit als Kategorie der Ästhetik* [On Peculiarity as an Aesthetic Category] (Neuwied/Berlin 1967), pp. 269–85.
32. See JÓZSEF RÉVAI, *Irodalmi tanulmányok* [Studies of Literature] (Budapest 1950), pp. 283–318.
33. Babits (1883–1941) was one of the outstanding poets of Hungary's *art pour l'art* movement.
34. LUKÁCS, *Irodalom és demokrácia*, p. 119.
35. *ibid.*, pp. 126–33.
36. RÉVAI, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
37. *ibid.*, p. 287.
38. For a more detailed discussion of Déry's post-war situation, see ISTVÁN MÉSZÁROS, *La rivolta degli intellettuali in Ungheria. Dal dibattito su Lukács al circolo Petőfi* (Turin 1958), pp. 58–90.
39. Beginning with the hostile reception of *Alvilági játékok* (Infernal Plays) in 1946, scarcely one of Déry's works escaped the severest criticism.
40. From "Barátaim!" [My Friends!], in *Irodalmi Ujság* (Budapest), 2 November 1956.
41. The poem depicts the changed world of the Hungarian peasantry through Illyés's description of a pre-war statue. Originally this statue represented a landlord towering over a peasant, who looked up at his master. During the war a bomb blasted the landlord figure from the monument; the peasant figure remained, a defiant and forceful survivor of a once-humiliating monument.
42. In the Communist Party discussion of Déry's *Felelet* in 1952.

43. Déry was accused of being under the influence of "bourgeois ideology" and of championing "the subjectivist 'theory' of the writer's sovereignty: his independence from the class, from the Party, and from politics." *Vita irodalmunk helyzetéről* [Debate on the State of Our Literature] (Budapest 1952), p. 14.
44. TIBOR DÉRY, *Niki, the Story of a Dog*, trans. by E. Hyams (London 1958). Déry's original plan—a kind of psychological study—was to tell the story of how the arrival of his dog's first litter of puppies changed the character of his morose spinster housekeeper for the better, "as she took upon herself Niki's maternity." This plan, in the increasingly dramatic atmosphere in Hungary, was radically transformed; only a few elements of it remain in the greatly enlarged and "politicized" final version.
45. The quotation is a translation of part of the work published in the journal *Kortárs* (Budapest), December 1968, p. 1881.
46. TIBOR DÉRY, *Szembenézni* [Facing Up to It] (Budapest 1968), pp. 96–7.
47. Déry told me that he believed *A kiközösítő* was the best work he had ever written, adding that he could write no more. His over-estimation of the significance of his St Ambrose story was inseparable from the crisis in which he found himself at that time. His memoirs, which he began a few months later, not only marked the end of that temporary paralysis in his literary career but heralded an amazingly fruitful new phase.
48. The translation is by Peter Simon.
49. GYÖRGY MOLDOVA, *Gumikutya* (Budapest 1967), pp. 76–7.
50. FERENC JUHÁSZ, *Virágzó világfa* [Blooming World-Tree] (Budapest 1965), p. 3.
51. FERENC JUHÁSZ, *Mit tehet a költő?* [What Can the Poet Do?] (Budapest 1967), p. 195.
52. ISTVÁN EÖRSI, *Változatok egy Közhelyre* [Variations on a Commonplace] (Budapest 1968), p. 23.
53. JÓZSEF LENGYEL, *From Beginning to End* and *The Spell*, trans. by Ilona Duczynska (London 1964), pp. 93–4. I have taken the liberty of re-translating one sentence.
54. *ibid.*, p. 155.
55. *ibid.*, p. 174.
56. See JÓZSEF LENGYEL, *Kicsi mérges öregúr* [Little Angry Old Man], in *Collected Works* (Budapest 1966), Vol. I.
57. JÓZSEF LENGYEL, *Reggeltől estig* [From Morning to Evening], *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 240.
58. JÓZSEF LENGYEL, *Sárga pipacsok* [Yellow Poppies], *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 215–27. A similar motif appears in *The Judge's Chair*, on p. 36 of the translation cited in Ref. 54 above:

> Last summer it was the flowers that had brought on this state of revulsion. Once or twice he had been ordered to the SS barracks to repair wireless sets and in front of the barracks there were well-

> tended flower beds. There, where the flowers grew, shedding their fragrance, he was seized by a violent nausea, a physical horror. There, too, a wave of silt dimmed his eyes. Each time at that very spot, where the flowers were. He could not explain it nor did he try to.

59. LENGYEL, *Kicsi mérges öregúr*, *ed. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 162.
60. LENGYEL, *Reggeltől estig*, *ed. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 241.
61. *ibid.*, p. 247.

CHAPTER 15

The Literature of the Left

David Caute

I

Although politically "committed" literature* can be motivated equally by left- or right-wing sentiment, the notion of literary commitment has increasingly become associated with Marxism, Communism, or Socialism—in short, with the Left. Following the distinction made by Sartre, we can argue that all literature, regardless of the writer's subjective intentions, is "committed" in the sense that it yields a view of man-in-the-world that is objectively either progressive or reactionary; or we can concentrate on the writer's conscious articulation of a certain point of view.

The second criterion is the one most commonly employed. Broadly speaking it is true that the Right traditionally wishes to preserve the *status quo*, whereas the Left aspires to change it. (Both Fascism and the existence of a 50-year-old communist regime complicate this simple distinction.) For many conservative writers the wish to preserve the *status quo* is more a passive than an active process, a sentiment of tacit acceptance, and consequently their novels tend to ignore questions of political action and ideology. Thus they are not (in the second of Sartre's two senses) "committed" writers. It could further be argued that overt right-wing commitment materializes on a substantial scale only when the dangers of mob rule, red revolution, or materialist totalitarianism become vivid and menacing. In contrast, for left-wing writers who wish to change the world, political action and ideology carry a persistent appeal as literary themes.

What distinguishes 20th-century literature is not only its orientation toward politics but also the nature of that orientation. Not content merely to uphold a general ideal, cause, or social class, writers have adopted specific political parties and nation states as the valid embodiments of their ideals. The basic causes for this development are historical: the

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* Literature here means the novel, drama, and poetry; left-wing drama lies outside the scope of the present chapter.

Industrial Revolution, the entry of the masses into the political arena, the growth of formal democracy and party-political life, the creation of socialist parties in the late 19th century, and more recently the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent creation of the world communist movement. After 1917 the chips were down. The widespread appeal of Marxism is a further factor because Marxism, particularly in its Leninist-Stalinist form, combines great respect for the impact of the written word with an insistence that ideological neutrality, even in the realm of art, is impossible. The communist parties succeeded with astonishing rapidity in politicizing the cultural climate of the age, in polarizing intellectual opinion, and in persuading (or coercing) writers to throw themselves into the fray.

After the initial mood of renovating optimism that followed the Bolshevik Revolution had subsided, there was in the early 1920s a noticeable falling away of intellectual support, a mood of disenchantment. The emigration of many leading writers from Russia had its effect. By 1924, with the onset of the anti-Trotsky campaign, the soft line—the *main tendue* to wavering intellectuals—had been replaced by the process of "bolshevization" and by repeated purges of the communist parties. It was not until the era of the Five Year Plans and the rise of Nazism that international Communism began to attract widespread intellectual and literary support. By 1933 the German Communist Party could count on the active support of Johannes Becher, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Toller, Erich Weinert, Anna Seghers, and Ludwig Renn; in France, André Malraux, Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Paul Nizan, Louis Aragon, Jean-Richard Bloch, and even André Gide were positively committed; in Britain the movement was strongest among poets, notably W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, and Stephen Spender; and in the United States leading novelists such as John Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, James T. Farrell, and Nathanael West were proclaiming their alienation from American capitalism. The playwrights Clifford Odets and John Howard Lawson became communists. Later, in the years of the Cold War, Howard Fast carried the red flag that others had let fall.

But, for many writers who had turned hopefully toward Communism, the god ultimately failed. Some, such as Gide, Victor Serge, or Arthur Koestler, were appalled by what they saw of Stalinism in action; others rebelled against what they regarded as the cynical and machiavellian role of the Comintern in Africa, Spain, or their own countries: the young Albert Camus, George Orwell, Spender, Ignazio Silone, Day Lewis, Dos Passos, and Farrell are examples. For some, such as Malraux and Nizan, it was the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 that could not be morally digested. The post-war period was characterized by a contradictory flowing of tides, with some older writers loudly lamenting the evils of Stalinist forced-labour camps and phoney trials, while many younger intellectuals, partly moved by fear of the United States, embraced the communist *lendemains qui chantent*. Until 1948 it was possible to take up a flexible, intermediate position; by 1951 the middle ground had become a depopulated no man's land. Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, formerly colleagues, now terminated their friendship in a splutter of hard words. The Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution can be seen in retrospect to have ended the era in which the Soviet Union could demand and gain the unconditional support of Western intellectuals. It was a mark of the times that in 1966 Louis Aragon, a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, should condemn the way the trials of the Soviet writers Daniel and Sinyavsky had been conducted.*

II

The epoch beginning with the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871 provides a logical starting-point for a survey of modern left-wing literature. Democracy returned to France, political parties were developed in Germany and Italy, the Industrial Revolution advanced rapidly on the Continent, generating the social tensions of modern capitalism, and the socialist movement achieved a measure of international cohesion after 1889.

The novels of Émile Zola (1840–1902) represent the difficult transition from an authentically bourgeois to an authentically socialist literature. Zola's faith in republican democracy, combined with his distrust of socialist theory and revolutionary violence, was a logical individual response to the dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution, bloodshed and counter-bloodshed, that had plagued France since 1789. Zola believed in evolutionary progress. But to understand the connection between a writer's specific social philosophy and the literary forms he employs, one must also take into account the intervening ideas derived from other disciplines (science, political theory, sociology, and so on) that mediate between content and form. Like the positivist sociologists Comte and Durkheim, Zola was impressed by the possible analogies between the natural and social sciences. Influenced particularly by Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), Zola concluded that both nature and society underwent an evolution that was *fatale*, *continuée*, and *constante*. Human progress was conditioned by a determinism based on the interaction of man's inner drives and the external *milieu*. He set out to illustrate this determinism in his Rougon-Macquart novels. Provided that the preliminary investigation of a subject was sufficiently thorough, Zola believed that thereafter the novel should and could shape itself in a true-to-life, logical sequence, expressing what was typical and commonplace in a given *milieu*, and avoiding the false thrills and romantic magnificence commonly employed by novelists. The emphasis on the portrayal of average lives and average abilities leads to a predetermined sequence of events rather than to a plot structured around the active impact of the hero on the world in which he lives.

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* Soviet literature is discussed in Ch. 13, "Russian Literature in the Twentieth Century."

Zola called this method Naturalism. Although none of his novels represents the naturalist mode in an absolutely pure form, the characteristics of the genre are clear: (a) subordination of art and rhetoric to "life"; (b) colloquial language, not only employed in the dialogue but also woven into the narrative; (c) emphasis on the description and force of things; (d) characters who are shaped by their environment rather than heroes who change it; (e) a tendency to examine only one stratum of society in any single novel; (f) a tone of moral neutrality, viewing situations and attitudes as healthy or unhealthy rather than as good or bad.

The correlation between content and form is evident from a comparison of Zola's novels *L'assommoir* and *Germinal*. Both books focus on the poorer sections of French society, but *L'assommoir* (1877) is the more naturalistic and positivistic of the two. The fatality of the *milieu*, of poverty, lust, alcoholism, and disease, blankets all the characters, particularly Gervaise herself. Gervaise is not a "heroine"; she is doomed from the outset. The life of the Parisian *faubourg* is depicted as cut off from the outer world. Political events, such as the *coup d'état* of 1851, are referred to only as distant and irrelevant dramas in the make-believe theatre of politics. But the Zola who wrote *Germinal* (1885), inspired by the miners' strikes at Anzin in 1884, was now wavering in his "scientistic" contempt for political solutions to social problems. Consequently the structure of the novel represents a partial disintegration of the naturalist mode. Whereas *L'assommoir* never moves beyond a single social stratum, *Germinal* shows the property-owning and managerial classes in direct confrontation with the miners they are exploiting. Hostile to the avaricious, profit-seeking mentality of the company, Zola seems to be weighing the whole capitalist system in the balance, and consequently he is led to consider whether socialist solutions, even violent ones, may not be justified. Étienne Lantier, who embodies this dilemma, is a "hero" in a sense that his mother

Gervaise was never a "heroine" in *L'assommoir*. Not only does he rebel against his environment, but his resulting actions substantially affect the course of events. A "plot" emerges.

But Zola steps back from the brink. Political action, in the sense of socialist panaceas, is ultimately discredited, and Étienne's Socialism is portrayed as a jumble of incompatible dogmas picked up haphazardly from Marx, Proudhon, Lassalle, and others. The fanatical Russian *émigré* and engine-man Souvarine, who eventually destroys the mine shaft in an act of nihilistic immolation, is introduced to illustrate the insane fanaticism of Bakuninist anarchism. Pluchart, the emissary of Marx's First International, erects the vast cathedral of the future world before the hypnotized miners, but in the event only 4000 francs arrive from London, barely enough for three days.

Germinal, then, leaves unresolved the problem: what is the mechanism for urgently needed social reform, if not working-class action? In the Marxist realist novel, the interaction of the hero and his environment is structured to reveal not only the material basis of exploitation but also man's capacity to replace an unjust world with a just one. In the Stalinist period the emphasis on heroic action reached a peak of voluntarism that was clearly more in the Romantic than in the materialist tradition. Marxist writers and critics have also been more confident than Zola was about the function of literature as *praxis*, its capacity to stimulate practical action. Zola assumed science to be properly detached, objective, and impartial, whereas Marxists identify authentic social science with the living projects of the working class.

This general contrast can be well illustrated by a comparison of *Germinal* with Maksim Gor'ky's *Mother* (1907), an early Bolshevik novel based on an incident that occurred on May Day 1902 at Somorvo, the factory suburb of Nizhni-Novgorod. An early passage in *Mother* indicates the extent to which the worlds of Zola and Gor'ky (1868–1936) overlapped:

> Life had always been like that. It flowed on in a turbid stream, slowly and evenly, year after year, and everything was bound together by deep-rooted habits of thinking and doing the same thing day after day.[1]

But in Gor'ky's mental universe education, propaganda, and militancy are depicted as chain-breakers, and it is primarily for this reason that Gor'ky gives less emphasis than Zola to the description of things and to the *milieu*, and more to theory, debate, and action. The mother and her son emerge as living embodiments of rebellion, of the human refusal to accept the humiliations and deprivations of a brutally hierarchical and oppressive social system. Zola's insistence that violence is self-defeating is here strongly denied. The Khokol declares: "For the sake of my comrades and our cause I could do anything. I could even kill my own son." The mother winces, but her son Pavel agrees: "You're right. Life is like that."[2] At the same time Gor'ky, like later socialist-realist writers, celebrates the party, in whose name he addresses the May Day crowd, as "the well-spring of our ideas."

This progression from Naturalism to Socialist Realism is sometimes apparent within the work of a single writer. Henri Barbusse's novel *Le feu* (1917; Under Fire), written before the Bolshevik Revolution fully clarified the novelist's social philosophy and provided him with a concrete source of allegiance, is above all characterized by its naturalistic descriptions of the horrors of war, the mud, the stench, the wounds, the battered corpses, the dumb despair. Political didacticism is worked into this naturalistic framework by way of abrupt statements attributed to soldiers slowly awakening from a state of uncomprehending bewilderment. But in *Clarté* (1918; Light), written after the Bolshevik Revolution, Barbusse (1873–1935) develops a structure better adapted to the *roman à thèse*, creating a plot in which the hero progresses from social conformism to disillusionment and finally to rebellion.

The naturalist mode has outlived the specific sociological, scientific, and political formulation that Zola gave it. But its limitations as a vehicle for left-wing commitment have remained strikingly apparent. Theodore Dreiser's novels *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914), for example, lay bare the morality of the new American financial aristocracy in a setting (Philadelphia and Chicago) documented and detailed with Zolaesque density. But the sheer weight of documentation thwarts critical coherence, and when Dreiser (1871–1945) moved toward Communism at the time of the Great Depression, he did so without being able to achieve a new philosophical integration in his writing.

The outstanding example of modern left-wing Naturalism is undoubtedly James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan trilogy. The setting is the poor-white, predominantly Irish Catholic, section of Chicago during the first three decades of the century. The first two novels of the trilogy, *Young Lonigan* (1932) and *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (1934), convey in naturalistic style a sluggish, apathetic, and self-enclosed universe in which anything different is invariably distrusted or feared. Studs himself is a non-hero in precisely the sense that Zola's Gervaise was a non-heroine; neither character can understand, escape from, or challenge the environment.

And just as Zola depicts the poor as being constantly at the mercy of the sexual urge and aimless copulation, so too Studs contracts a venereal disease and finally gets pregnant a young girl whom he cannot afford to marry. Realist writers, particularly those of the socialist school, have tended to keep sex "in perspective," in keeping with their belief that reason should control instinct and emotion. In *Mother*, the sexual relationships of the revolutionary heroes and heroines are translated into the noble love that sacrifices itself for the cause

As in Barbusse's *Le feu*, the political perspective of the Studs Lonigan trilogy is indicated by the injection of didactic scenes and statements, frequently of an ironical nature. These increase in scale and scope in the final volume, *Judgment Day* (1935), as the author tries to synthesize the influence of John Dewey and behavioural psychology with a Marxist perspective. But Farrell (b. 1904) balked at the rosy optimism of Socialist Realism; Studs dies young, the helpless victim of poverty, ignorance, and *petit-bourgeois* bigotry.

According to the most influential of Marxist critics, Georg Lukács, the three pillars of literary Realism are: the location of the action in a precise time and place; a progressive perspective; and a reflection of the totality of the age. It is on the third of these counts that Naturalism most conspicuously fails to satisfy Marxist demands. The divergence between the two schools is implicit in the recent call from the Czech communist writer Jirí Hájèk for "a critique of reality from the standpoint of the chief conditions for man's self-realization." Literature, he said, ought "to stimulate awareness of human responsibility in the widest sense, both individually and historically, along with incessant protest and agitation against anything that reduces men to mere puppets of fate and history."[3] Yet this is precisely the tendency of Naturalism: to make men puppets of fate and history.

Socialist Realism might have acquired more respectable credentials had it not become associated during the Stalin era with a massive assault by the party on the writer's personal freedom. After all, Lenin had commented in 1905 that "in this field [literature] greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and phantasy, form and content."[4] And in 1924 Trotsky added: "Our Marxist conception of the objective social dependence and social utility of art, when translated into the language of politics, does not at all mean a desire to dominate art by means of decrees and orders."[5] Yet this was precisely the policy launched by Andrei Zhdanov when he addressed the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. Zhdanov's various pronouncements, formulas, and denunciations were accepted by Western communist parties in a spirit of mechanical obedience. In 1948, Louis Aragon, acting as spokesman for the French party, described Zhdanov's theses on art, literature, and music as "far-sighted," "plunging," and "profound," and likened them to a friendly but firm hand held out to those hesitant spirits whose vacillations had so far prevented them from becoming true engineers of human souls (as Stalin had put it).[6] Decadence, formalism, pessimism, and art for art's sake were constantly castigated in the party press.

It is hardly surprising that many writers found this hard to swallow. André Malraux had told the Soviet writers' congress in 1934 that Soviet literature was in danger of mistaking authentic individuality for bourgeois individualism. Victor Serge, at one time a revolutionary bolshevik militant, was repelled by the new cultural orthodoxy. After the war, Sartre's comments on Zhdanovism were scarcely less hostile than those of Malraux and Camus. Dogma, he said, was always the enemy of freedom. In East Berlin, Bertolt Brecht complained in 1953 that Socialist Realism had been forced on artists like "so much bad beer." In an unpublished note he wrote:

> The campaign against the formalism of decaying bourgeois art has turned into a campaign against the sense of form. . . . *It is only boots that can be made to measure.*[7]

French novels of the socialist-realist genre were almost invariably employed to canvass the party line on some urgent issue, either recent or contemporary. Paul Nizan's *Le cheval de Troie* (1937; The Trojan Horse) took the town of Villefranche as the setting for bitter class struggle in the period of the Popular Front. Radicals, socialists, and communists are shown—in accordance with the current party line—joining forces to resist the menace of Fascism. Aragon's massive, multi-volume novel *Les communistes* (1950–1) defends every zigzag of the party line during the period of the phoney war and German invasion. Trotskyists are denounced as *flics* and Gestapo agents, the persecution of communists is attributed to the government's anxiety to make peace with Germany and war with Russia, the Soviet attack on Finland is justified, and the party's clandestine approach to the German occupation authorities in May–June 1940 is camouflaged.

In the Cold War years the propagandist potentialities of the novel were more systematically maximized. The main target of André Stil's Stalin Prize-winning novel *Le premier choc* (1951) was the Atlantic Alliance. Stil depicts an Atlantic sea port "occupied" by American forces, and a native population whose only protection against enslavement is the Communist Party. Pierre Courtade, who, like Stil, worked as a journalist for *L'Humanité*, fired broadsides at McCarthyism and racism in the United States, at American military policy, and at the criminal folly of France's war in Indo-China in his two novels, *Jimmy* (1951) and *La rivière noire* (1953). Hélène Parmelin, in *Noir sur blanc* (1954), takes as her setting the offices of *L'Humanité* at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War. Her hero Frédéric, with his creator's apparent approval, echoes the Tass line that the South first attacked the North. Tito's regime in Yugoslavia is described as a fascist one; had the novel been written two years later, Yugoslavia would no doubt have miraculously re-emerged in its "authentic" socialist colours. Courtade's novels make a case not only for the Stockholm Peace Appeal but also for Lysenko's theory of genetics, at that time officially in favour. However, the Stalinist convictions of a novelist such as Courtade are not without their integrity, and even after Khrushchev had set in motion the anti-Stalin campaign Courtade wrote *La place rouge* (1961) in order to plead that it had been reasonable at the time to believe in the authenticity of the Moscow trials, reasonable to denounce Gide for his criticisms of the Soviet Union, reasonable even to subscribe to the cult of Stalin.

In this socialist realist literature, the French Communist Party and its leaders are treated with awe and an almost mystical reverence. In the novels of Aragon (b. 1897) and Stil, Maurice Thorez, the party's Secretary-General, has only to appear on the scene, extend his large, manly hand, and utter a few supremely pertinent words, and the result is inevitably a new level of confidence and elation in the fictional heroes.

But communist writers, like many of their non-communist colleagues, are usually happier when satirizing the bourgeoisie than when struggling to portray the proletariat in its revolutionary development. André Stil, it is true, does show a convincing familiarity with working-class life, but in this respect he is exceptional. Aragon's novels *Les cloches de Bâle* (1934; The Bells of Basel), *Les beaux quartiers* (1936), and *Les voyageurs de l'impériale* (1947; Passengers of Destiny) all show the author gravitating toward the class into which he was born. In the first of these novels, we enter a world of big industrialists, parliamentary deputies, diplomats, and bankers. In the second novel, we are at the outset introduced to the chocolate manufacturer Barrel in the course of his attempt to break a strike. In the third novel, pride of place goes to the Mercadier family, servants of state and academics who have married into the aristocracy. Even Aragon's social rebels are of comparatively high birth: Catherine Simonidzé in *Les cloches de Bâle*, or Armand, the emergent hero of *Les beaux quartiers* and the future communist militant of *Les communistes*, who is the son of a radical mayor.

Nor is this tendency an exclusively French one. In *Spartacus* (1951) Howard Fast (b. 1914) seems more at ease depicting the licentiousness, stupidity, or cunning of the Roman upper classes than when focussing the narrative on the slave Spartacus and his rebel army. Here symbolic attachments serve as a substitute for realistic analysis: the lower orders emerge as virile, fertile, and honest, whereas the upper classes are generally bitter, perverted, and cynical.

The socialist-realist novel pivots structurally on the role of the hero. The Marxist hero is the measure of the world's plasticity and of the capacity of ideology to inspire individual and collective transcendence of an inert, oppressive *milieu*. The high incidence of abrupt conversions, of Saul becoming Paul, is perhaps due more to literary convention than to the implications of Marxist doctrine. But it also follows from the tendency to write about bourgeois characters whose destiny is to atone for their original social sin. Yet it is very rarely in such characters that the most admired qualities of all emerge. Small-scale imitations of Stalin himself were normally reserved for heroes of proletarian origin, such as Stil's docker Henri or Fast's Spartacus. Like Stalin, Spartacus possesses clairvoyance, courage, inflexible determination, and an inspiring modesty. "In that moment, with startling clarity, Spartacus saw his tactics, the whole pattern of his tactics in the years to come."[8] He refuses to be dictator over the slave army; he informs the slaves that they, and not he, will make the laws. But then he immediately decrees that each man shall have only one wife and no other women. This contradiction is typical of the democratic-paternalistic schizophrenia of Stalinist writers.

"Getting the point across" by internal means—by way of plot, speech, and action—has been a major problem for Socialist Realism, the result being a resort finally to externalized exposition. Here the artist fails. At the close of *Les cloches de Bâle*, Aragon is reduced to an almost epileptic change of style in order to ram home his point. The heroine, Catherine, is abruptly jettisoned in favour of Clara Zetkin, the future German communist leader. Says the author: "I can speak of Catherine no more. Hesitant, vacillating Catherine, as she slowly approaches the light."[9] "Yes, one must begin again with both of them, with a Clara for heroine . . . and not Catherine."[10] The same technique (or collapse) occurs in *Les beaux quartiers*, when Aragon loses interest in his hero Armand, and turns instead to a long list of good causes that the great Jean Léon Jaurès would apparently have supported had he not been assassinated in 1914. The almost neurotic desire to banish all possible ambiguity led Fast in the same expository direction as Aragon. "Cicero was one of those young men—present in every age—who are capable of shedding every scruple. . . ."[11] And later: "Tales became legends and legends became symbols, but the war of the oppressed against those who oppressed them went on and on."[12]

We have devoted considerable space to what may be regarded as essentially second-rate literature, and it is important to explain why. Here, for the first time, literature is mobilized, organized, almost militarized as an element in a wider political campaign. For the first time writers have wilfully bastardized and diminished their art in the interests of a greater good. It is also the case that even those critics who have stressed the correlations between literature and society have been prone to derive their conclusions from the works of great writers alone. This emphasis on quality rather than quantity is particularly paradoxical in Marxist criticism, which too often assumes that the most sociologically and ideologically "representative" works are works of genius. But the reverse is more likely to be the case.

III

Novelists of the non-communist Left, including fellow-travellers, have tended to blend their admiration for aspects of the communist movement with a residual suspicion that both rigid discipline and uncontrolled fanaticism are incompatible with the highest claims of art and intellect. Such an ambivalence runs strongly throughout Nikos Kazantzakis's *Toda Raba*, written in the late 1920s, and particularly in his portrait of the sensitive but pitiless Jewess Rahel, who works for the Cheka, has neat answers derived from Karl Marx to all questions, and finally commits suicide out of a sense of personal failure. In the novels of both Ignazio Silone (b. 1900) and André Malraux (b. 1901) is to be found admiration for the active face of Marxism offset by a growing distrust of communist bureaucracy. Malraux's two novels of the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s, *Les conquérants* (1928; The Conquerors) and *La condition humaine* (1933; Man's Estate), draw a sharp contrast between the Roman, administrative Bolshevism of the Comintern and its agent in China, Borodin, on the one hand, and the inspired, heroic, sacrificial spirit of revolt of the fictional heroes Garine, Kyo, Chen, and Katow, on the other. But between this early ambivalence and Malraux's final rejection of Communism in 1939 there intervened a period of more intense (although never ideologically orthodox) commitment. In both *Le temps du mépris* (1935; Days of Contempt) and *L'espoir* (1937; Days of Hope), Communism emerges as the only cause or movement that combines idealism with a sense of the practical. In *L'espoir* Malraux attributes to the Spanish anarchists the flair and impetuosity that he had earlier admired in the communist heroes of *La condition humaine*. But in *L'espoir* characters such as Garcia and Manuel express Malraux's own view that apocalyptic fervour without military organization can lead only to certain defeat.

Another famous novel of the Spanish Civil War, Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1941), makes a case for having accepted communist leadership in Spain while at the same time disparaging aspects of the communist mentality. The Russian general Golz is made to joke: "I am *Général Soviétique*. I never think. Do not try to trap me into thinking."[13] Later Hemingway causes the Soviet journalist Karkov to repeat the charges against Bukharin, Zinoviev, and the "Trotskyists" in general in a flat, robot-like voice. But the most destructive portrayal comes with the appearance of the fanatical and suspicion-crazy political commissar, Comrade Massart, modelled on the French communist André Marty.

The most protracted and exhaustive investigation of the implications of Communism for the progressive intellectual is to be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's trilogy *Les chemins de la liberté* (1945–9; The Roads to Freedom). In the first volume Sartre (b. 1905) juxtaposes the introverted, self-critical hesitancy of Mathieu with the clear-cut, poised confidence of the communist militant Brunet. But by the time that the third volume, *La mort dans l'âme* (1949; Iron in the Soul), has brought the two men to the military and moral collapse of France, Mathieu is achieving growing self-identity through crisis, whereas Brunet has to grapple with the erosion of his confidence in a party whose absolute integrity he had never doubted. The dilemma that Sartre, Camus, and other French intellectuals experienced in the face of post-war Communism is charted in loving detail in Simone de Beauvoir's novel *Les mandarins* (1954).

The bitter dispute that separated Sartre and Camus in 1952 largely revolved around the scope and legitimacy of revolutionary violence. Sartre had concluded that in the real world of class struggles *les mains sales* could not be avoided. Of course he was by no means the first radical novelist to accept Marx's premise that force is the midwife of history. Even William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), a eulogistic dream of a peaceful, harmonious future, accepts that the initial stages of the revolution will be marked by violence and civil war. Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1907), while predicting the ultimate emergence of the brotherhood of man, envisages the immediate future in terms of appalling barbarism and bloodshed. In Kazantzakis's *Toda Raba* there is a brilliant description of a congress of oriental revolutionaries vowing vengeance against the whole white race. Kazantzakis recoils, but he cannot condemn. Silone's hero Pietro Spina comes by way of experience to the conclusion that words are powerless against the actuality of fascist oppression, and that the resistance must demonstrate its existence by acts of terrorism. As for Malraux, violence flashes like lightning through all his novels; but he took pains to distinguish between "force," the perpetual strategy of the oppressors, and "violence," the cruel but necessary affirmation of man's refusal to be treated as an object. For Malraux, as for Camus later, violence became a valid gesture for the individual only when it entailed a sacrificial death or the risk of such a death. For Chen, who attempts to murder Chiang Kai-shek in *La condition humaine*, murder entails a suicide that is the ultimate act of liberty and dignity. But the obsessive, wilful terrorism of Hong in *Les conquérants* is clearly condemned. Nevertheless *L'espoir* reinforces the impression that Malraux tended to romanticize violence; here, in flashes of white-hot language, he creates an aesthetic out of combat, whether it be the desperate duels between machines or the quick, nervous improvisations of men. The divide between Malraux's heroism and that of Hemingway is more apparent than real, more a matter of different traditions of articulation than any fundamental disagreement about manhood, idealism, and self-sacrifice. Hemingway's Robert Jordan is cool, laconic, and no philosopher; he wastes few words; he will avoid death if he can, but he will always put pride before security. Jordan's death is perfectly logical, but emotionally gratuitous.

The heroes of left-wing literature fall into certain recurring patterns. There are those who grope toward the light; there are those for whom illumination comes like a thunderbolt; and there are those fully conscious heroes whose idealism involves an inevitably tragic fate. Sartre's novels represent the first tendency, as do Silone's Spina and Sinclair Lewis's Doremus Jessup in *It Can't Happen Here* (1935). Sartre's Mathieu is a man who has throughout his adult life been inhibited from committing himself to any cause by his sense of the absurdity of all human endeavour. But his own involvement in a crisis situation, the invasion of France, jolts him into an awareness of individual responsibility and so propels him from the syndrome of words to self-definition through action.

The dawning awareness of the narrator-hero in B. Traven's *The Death Ship* (1934) is conveyed by a curve of events that is both naturalistic and allegorical. Early in the novel the narrator, a sailor from New Orleans, reflects: "I could not understand how anybody on earth could be displeased with life. Communists, reformers and hell-drummers ought to be kicked out of this beautiful world of ours."[14] But finding himself suddenly without a ship or any means of identification, and hounded from one European country to another, he encounters the inhuman aspects of bureaucracy and grows cynical. Later, toiling in the hell of a "death ship"—a symbol of the capitalist system—he sheds his cool, ironical tone and becomes bitter and impassioned.

The heroes of Malraux and Hemingway, on the other hand, appear as fixed quantities, like chess pieces in a game predestined to a tragic conclusion. Psychology gives way to situation, and choice is merely freedom to do what has to be done. Although Malraux's heroes, such as Kyo, seize upon the active dimension of Marxism and discard its passive, deterministic elements, they are doomed to triumph only in defeat. This is true, at least, in those of Malraux's novels that can properly be called "novels," in the sense of structuring the heroes' problematical relationship to their world through the medium of a causally determined plot. The novels that reflect Malraux's brief period of maximum commitment to Communism, *Le temps du mépris* and *L'espoir*, are narratives (*récits*) in lyrical-epic form whose breathlessness emanates from an involvement so intense that it eliminates the gap by which art necessarily separates itself from life. Hemingway's attitude toward the Spanish Civil War was more that of a spectator, and the structure of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* reflects this relative detachment. Soon Malraux was to abandon the novel form entirely, just as, a decade later, Sartre, weighed down by the enormity of collective man's material problems, turned from the novel (and partly from the drama as well) to the study of economics, history, and sociology.

Silone, Malraux, Hemingway, and Sartre are widely admired for their ability to integrate their philosophy and their commitment with the internal action of their novels. The impression is of a coherent art. The majority of left-wing novelists, however, have been no more successful than the Socialist Realists in avoiding a resort to direct, externalized exposition. A conspicuous example is Jack London's hero Ernest Everhard, whose main role in the early chapters of *The Iron Heel* is to hammer home the basic Marxist case by means of interminable speeches. Morris, in *News from Nowhere*, succumbs to the same temptation, causing Hammond—who takes the narrator on a conducted tour of the brave new world—to explain its mechanism and its morality in the course of long monologues. Upton Sinclair frequently interrupts the hero's adventures in *The Jungle* (1901) in order to make a general point: "And so Jurgis got a glimpse of the high-class criminal world of Chicago . . ."; and so on. It is of course easier for the writer to demonstrate or illustrate the evils of capitalism (which exist) than to bring to life an ideal society that still belongs to the province of dreams. Thus Sinclair is forced to employ the device later used by Aragon when he abruptly injects his ignorant and bewildered hero Jurgis into a socialist congress and exposes him to the illuminating solutions propounded by a great oratorical tongue. Finally the author invents a rather artificial debate, or rather socratic dialogue, in the course of which reason—and therefore the socialist argument—prevails. Barbusse, too, relied heavily on exposition. *Le feu* climaxes with an appeal for equality, the great human formula; at the climax of *Clarté* the plot is abandoned in favour of generalized pleas on behalf of women's rights, republicanism, the struggle against imperialism, and—once again—reason. Sinclair Lewis, a master of the craft of fiction when he chose to be, made little attempt in *It Can't Happen Here* to conceal the fact that he had hastily put together a thinly fictionalized tract: "So debated Doremus, like some hundreds of thousands of other craftsmen, teachers, lawyers, what-not, in some dozens of countries under a dictatorship. . . ."[15]

The use of direct exposition is often linked to the committed writer's desire to cram documentary material into his novel. Upton Sinclair's descriptions of the meat-packing factories of Chicago are said to have brought about a reform of the law. Jack London made a bridge between the particular and the general by inserting explanatory footnotes, ostensibly the work of some future editor-historian (*The Iron Heel* claims to be a manuscript recovered several centuries after the events it describes). Dreiser's passion for facts frequently led him to step outside the internal narrative: " . . . the first Atlantic cable had not been laid as yet. . . ."[16] There is undoubtedly a limit to the quantity of documentary material that the traditional realist novel-form can bear, and even the naturalist mode reveals a saturation point. In the 1920s and 1930s American writers evolved new techniques of relating individuals to their environment. Farrell's *Judgment Day* is distinguished from the two earlier novels of the Studs Lonigan trilogy by its incorporation of cinema excerpts, newsreels, newspaper headlines, and fragments of radio broadcasts—techniques parallel to those being pioneered by Brecht in the theatre.

The novelist who employed the alienation effect most extensively was not Farrell but John Dos Passos (1896–1970). The massive trilogy that Dos Passos entitled, with suitable grandiloquence, *U.S.A.* (1930–6) can be regarded as an extension of the naturalist tradition in so far as it downgraded the "hero" and the plot, relied heavily on historically accurate documentation, sought to depict average lives blindly pursuing money and sex, and concentrated on behaviour rather than psychology. But Dos Passos' behaviourism absorbs Marxism to the extent that, however great the emphasis on the environmental conditioning of man, the desirability and feasibility of destroying a corrupting and unjust social system is constantly stressed. Dos Passos aims not only to reveal the connections between private and public life but also to satirize the bogus quality of official morality when set beside the bitter reality of individual lives. It was Dos Passos' thesis that the native energy and inventive ingenuity of modern America had been exploited and perverted by the profit system, by the Morgans, Fords, and Hearsts. One of the first novelists to appreciate the power of the mass media, he used "camera eyes" and "newsreels," experimental typography and non-punctuation, partisan selection and pungent irony as methods of exposing official humbug and deceit. At the same time he showed himself deeply sympathetic to the heroes of revolt, such as John Reed, Big Bill Hayward, and the fictional Marxists and communists who attempted to organize the poor and unemployed in the face of savage police brutality.

The behaviourist novel shares with its realist counterpart a notable self-confidence about its ability to locate and portray the causes of social anguish and alienation. But in the course of the present century the optimism of the Enlightenment, the belief that "knowledge liberates and absolute knowledge liberates absolutely," has increasingly lost ground before the renewed possibility that the evils of capitalism merely mirror the evil nature of man. The desire for a better world combined with gnawing doubts as to its likelihood has led many writers into forms of literary withdrawal, into allegory and semi-allegory. Unlike the exponent of "art for art's sake," the allegorical novelist does not separate art and life, but he does tend to share a distrust of all known parties, ideologies, and panaceas. By displacing the scene of the action in time or space, he aspires to the realm of pure criticism. Thus Anatole France's satire *L'île des pingouins* (1908; Penguin Island), a mocking allegory of French history, offsets its attacks on the reactionaries who hounded Dreyfus with an unflattering portrait of the republican and socialist politicians who inherited the dividend of the Dreyfus affair. Although France's general standpoint is left-wing, his use of the allegorical form reinforces the general conclusion that power automatically corrupts and that the few will always trample on the many.

A similar possibility of escape from the specific to the general is offered by the utopia, the ideal society set in the future. A few examples of this genre display the highest optimism. Morris's *News from Nowhere* echoes many of the prophecies of Marx and Lenin: a society whose members co-operate harmoniously while developing their own individuality, where the division between physical and mental labour has vanished, where money is no longer seen, where prisons, law courts, armies, and parliaments are extinct, where Communism has replaced private property.* But in the 20th century utopias have been far outnumbered by dystopias, by novels predicting catastrophe. In so far as such novels were calling attention to the power of an increasingly predatory capitalism, their excessive pessimism may sometimes have been a device to alert public opinion before it was too late. Such may have been the intention behind Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, which predicts a brutal and oligarchical capitalist regime provoking a rising of the poor in Chicago, reminiscent of the Paris Commune, in order to reduce the population to a blind, helpless slave rabble. H. G. Wells wrote several novels in which the Frankenstein of capitalism joins forces with the Frankenstein of science to produce an unbearable monster.

But much more characteristic of the years since the Bolshevik Revolution have been the dystopias spawned by the emergence of totalitarian Communism. These novels, of which the most notable are Evgeni Zamyatin's *We* (1920), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949), form part of the "god that failed" literature, which also embraces Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), an allegory in the pure sense, as well as semi-allegories that oscillate between the real and the surreal, such as Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1941) and Norman Mailer's *Barbary Shore* (1951). Yet *We* and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* certainly belong to the literature of the Left, for neither Zamyatin (1884–1937) nor Orwell (1903–50) allowed his disenchantment to erode his commitment to a better, more humane Socialism. Even so, their fears of total uniformity and the destruction of all individuality, all sense of history and culture, all family loyalties, all connection between sex and love, forced them to defend the values of the liberal enlightenment. Orwell believed that the new totalitarianism, with its infinite appetite for power and its total control over highly developed mass media, would lead inexorably to the destruction of logic, reason, and language, and to the widespread acceptance of such paradoxes as "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength"—in short, to "doublethink."

There is a certain irony here, for the writers and critics who subscribed to Socialist Realism in the Stalin era insisted that literature must be coherently mimetic of a coherent reality. This consideration leads us to one of the most striking features of left-wing literature in our own time: its almost total hostility toward the modernist *avant-garde*, toward the most innovating and experimental aesthetic movements of the age. As Alain

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* B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) envisages a similar society, but one reached by means of elitist behavioural engineering rather than by mass political action.

Robbe-Grillet put it: "The socialist Revolution distrusts revolutionary Art and, what is more, it is not obvious that it is wrong to do so."[17] Modernist literature tends to challenge traditional notions of human personality, of the objectivity of time, space, and environment; it tends to suggest that reason is the court fool of instinct and emotion, that the subconscious is in permanent occupation of the terrain of the conscious, and that any idea of language being capable of tool-like precision is mythical. The majority of modernist writers have been not so much politically reactionary as apolitical, committed to the autonomy of art. The young Valéry, Tzara, Breton, Gide, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, Sarraute, and Robbe-Grillet may be (or have been) men and women of the Left *as citizens*, but they have all insisted that art can be revolutionary only within its own legitimate sphere, the sphere of aesthetic form. To compare, for example, the novels and the political statements of Günter Grass is to realize that the novelist and the citizen are working at different levels. André Gide (1869–1951), in the period of his commitment to Soviet Communism, stood paralysed before the demands of Socialist Realism. In a message to the 1934 congress of Soviet writers he said: "If the USSR triumphs—and she ought to triumph—her art will soon disengage itself from the struggle: I mean: will emancipate itself."[18]

The classic illustration of what has seemed to be an irreconcilable antagonism between Marxism and Modernism is the attempted *rapprochement* between French Surrealism and Communism in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In his *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924), André Breton (1896–1966) had defined Surrealism as psychic automatism attempting to express the true functioning of thought without any control by reason and without aesthetic or moral preoccupations. Such a programme naturally aroused the scorn of Marxists, and the Surrealists, for their part, ridiculed all political activity and viewed the Soviet Union with scepticism. Like Ionesco later, they insisted that the true revolution must first come in *l'esprit*. But after 1925 the war of the Riff in Morocco and the increasingly reactionary climate in France moved the Surrealists to make conciliatory overtures that resulted in Breton, Aragon, Éluard, and others joining the Communist Party in 1927. The experiment was not a happy one. Breton was summoned five times before the party's Control Commission to explain why he continued to subscribe to Surrealism. When asked by the party to write a report on the state of the gas industry in Italy, he refused. Paul Éluard's collection of poems, *La vie immédiate* (1932), showed a failure to reconcile political commitment and the surrealist mode, and he soon drifted away from the party. Meanwhile, Breton quoted Marx and Engels against the theoreticians of Socialist Realism, insisting that art could successfully express the latent but never the manifest content of the age, and that it was only in the interior world, on the frontiers of the fantastic, that art could thrive. By 1935 he had been expelled from the party. The Trotskyists, with whom some Surrealists now conducted a brief flirtation, were scarcely less sceptical than the Stalinists.

The rupture was inevitable. All the great voices of Marxism—from Marx, Engels, and Lenin to Stalin, Zhdanov, and Mao Tse-tung—have been unanimous in their preference for the realist mode in literature. Lenin, who regarded Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry as "tricky and affected," told Clara Zetkin: "I am unable to consider the productions of Futurism, Cubism, and other isms the highest manifestations of artistic genius. I do not understand them, I experience no joy from them."[19] Similarly Trotsky, certainly no philistine, believed that the masses would respond only to novels developed in the classical tradition and would be nonplussed by abrupt leaps into formal experiment. Later Sartre insisted that pure art and empty art were identical; he described Surrealism as a type of bourgeois bohemianism and as an attack on objectivity. Sartre called not only for a literature committed to freedom, but also for a prose that is utilitarian, significative, and a form of action—an action by disclosure. This assumption that a coherently significative language is possible, shared by all Marxist critics, is totally repudiated in a novel that is virtually a prototype of Modernism, Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1951), where Molloy himself cries out: "Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition."[20]

The surrealist movement did yield two important converts to Communism, however: Aragon and, later, Éluard. Aragon's surrealist novel, *Le paysan de Paris* (1926), marks a complete contrast with his subsequent socialist-realist novels. *Le paysan*, which has no plot, fragments its narrative into dream-like episodes during which the writer's eye wanders at random over street signs, advertisements, bar tariffs, menus, and occasional designs: "My life—a series of accidents."

But in 1930 Aragon attended the International Conference of Proletarian Writers at Kharkov, denounced the Surrealist Manifesto as contrary to dialectical materialism, and promised in future to submit himself and his work to party discipline. On his return to France he abandoned soft and lyrical images for the hard, clipped incendiarism of "Front Rouge":

> Descendez les flics
> Camarades

Descendez les flics
Plus loin vers l'ouest où dorment
Les enfants riches et les putains de première classe. . . .[21]

(Bring down the cops
Comrades
Bring down the cops
On, on towards the west where sleep
The children of the rich and first-class tarts. . . .)

Although Aragon's verse subsequently recovered its lyrical quality, in later years this lyricism was often adapted to the ponderous Romanticism of a court poet. Here, in 1953, he celebrates Maurice Thorez's return from the Soviet Union:

O femmes souriez et mêlez à vos tresses
Ces deux mots-là comme des fleurs, jamais fanées
Il revient Je redis ces deux mots-là sans cesse
Tout se colore d'eux après ces deux années
Il revient il revient il vient il va venir
En avant le bonheur de tous est dans nos mains
Il semble qu'à le dire on ouvre l'avenir
Et l'on entend déjà chanter les lendemains.[22]

(Oh women smile and mingle in your tresses
Those two words, like flowers never faded
He returns I repeat those two words ceaselessly
Everything is coloured by them after these two years
He returns he returns he comes he is going to come
From now onwards everyone's happiness is in our hands
It seems that by saying it one opens the future
And that one already hears tomorrows which sing.)

It was during World War II that Aragon's friend Paul Éluard (1895–1952) made his second and final conversion to Communism. The sincerity of Éluard's commitment cannot be doubted, but its beneficial effect on the quality of his poetry can. A poem dedicated to the people of Greece in 1944 reflects a self-conscious simplicity of content and style:

Peuple grec peuple roi peuple désespéré
Tu n'as plus rien à perdre que la liberté
Ton amour de la liberté de la justice
Et l'infini respect que tu as de toi-même.[23]

(Greek people sovereign people desperate people
You have no more to lose than liberty
Your love of liberty, of justice
And the infinite respect you have for yourself.)

But whereas the subject-matter of this poem provokes sympathy, Éluard's tribute to Stalin on his 70th birthday cannot be redeemed:

> Et Staline pour nous est présent pour demain
> Et Staline dissipe aujourd'hui le malheur
> La confiance est le fruit de son cerveau d'amour. . . .[24]
>
> (And Stalin for us is present for tomorrow
> And Stalin today dissipates unhappiness
> Confidence is the fruit of his loving intellect. . . .)

A particular problem facing the modern committed poet has been the general drift of poetry from a magisterial and cosmic outlook to the scrupulous depiction of private sensibility, to a mood of introversion and associative imagery that repels didacticism. In the 1930s, W. H. Auden attempted to resolve this problem by means of a detached intellectualism, and by the introduction of modern terms normally considered alien to poetry, such as "subterfuge," "locomotive," and "proletariat." But a poem such as "Spain" (1937) merely suggests a painful abyss between the poet's impersonal cerebration and the human tragedy of the Spanish Civil War. At the opposite extreme, Cecil Day Lewis's resort to hymn-like doggerel is no more satisfactory:

> The hooters are blowing.
> No heed let him take;
> When baby is hungry
> 'Tis best not to wake.
> Thy mother is crying,
> Thy dad's on the dole:
> Two shillings a week is
> The price of a soul.[25]

In retrospect, the Marxism of the English poets of the 1930s appears to have been superficial, frail, and an easy prey to disenchantment. None of them achieved the higher unity of content and form, logic and emotion, that puts the political poetry of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) in a class of its own (leaving out of consideration Soviet poetry). Brecht developed the ballad form into a rapier of satire (as in his attacks on the Third Reich) or into a moving call of exhortation to the workers (as in "Einheitsfrontlied" [United Front Song]). Many of Brecht's poems were set to music by Hanns Eisler and sung throughout the international labour movement. Brecht, who could be simple without being sententious, employed paradox, epigram, contrast, and uncompromising irony to maximum effect. A poem such as "Die Teppichweber von Kujan-Bulak ehren Lenin" (The Carpet-weavers of Kujan-Bulak Honour Lenin), a parable of common sense, keeps within healthy proportions the reverence of the workers for the heroes of Bolshevism, and so avoids the servile Romanticism of the French Stalinist poets.

But just as the most authentically indigenous communist movements have arisen in backward, peasant societies, so too has the freshest and most original Marxist poetry. The Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet's long poem *Letters to Taranta-Babu*, written at the time of Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia in 1936, and his poems written in prison, achieve a unity between feeling and thought, individual tragedy and the broader tragedy of history. In Hikmet's poetry the poet seems to matter less than the world he observes, a world of suffering that demands of the artist humility and simplicity. Simplicity was one of the qualities that the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904–74) pursued as his commitment to Communism intensified. Many of the poems of the first two volumes of his *Residencia en la tierra* (1925–31; Residence on Earth and Other Poems) are surrealistic, relying on automatism, auto-hypnotic verbalization, and hallucination as sources of inspiration. But in 1939 Neruda wrote: "The world has changed and so has my poetry." Now he wanted above all to communicate with the widest possible audience:

> Simplicity
> be with me, assist at my birth,
> teach me again how to sing
> a floodtide of virtue and truth,
> a crystalline victory.[26]

A revolutionary poet who started life as a village swineherd, having been deserted by his father at the age of three, yet fought his way to the university of Vienna, was the Hungarian Attila József (1905–37). Brilliant, erratic, poor, inclined towards morbidity, and often intensely lonely, József lived through a series of personal and political crises, culminating in his expulsion from the Hungarian Communist Party in 1933 and then, following a period of alternating inspiration and insanity, in his suicide under the wheels of a freight train when he was 32 years old. The author of six volumes of poems, from *Beggar of Beauty* (1922) to *Bear Dance* (1934), József became guilty in orthodox communist eyes of a heretical belief that the Freudian method was relevant to the understanding of mass political behaviour, and also of a "premature" commitment to the United Front of all democratic forces against Fascism. His odes and elegies reverberate with cold mists, bleak, poverty-blasted landscapes, peasants helpless against fate, factory workers and comrades hurrying through silent streets, avoiding the lamplight and straining their ears for sounds from behind. His poetry is also deeply personal: his broad canvas of the exploited poor was painted out of his own experience; it was his world—until he obliterated himself:

> At the freight station I had
> flattened myself against a tree
> like a piece of silence. . . .[27]

IV

At some future date the 1960s will probably stand out as a period of decisive transition in the history of left-wing literature and criticism. Marxist writers have been busily creating new alliances and alignments, bridges between East and West, treaties of non-aggression between Realism and Modernism. Although the trials of Daniel, Sinyavsky, and other Russian writers reflect the enduring hostility of the Soviet authorities toward Modernism, there has been a snowballing movement among Marxist writers and critics to make a cultural Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the giants of 20th-century Modernism—Joyce, Kafka, Faulkner, and Beckett. Writers such as Aragon, who at one time subscribed to Zhdanovism, have heaped ashes on their own heads. At the same time the comparative political and economic stability of the neo-capitalist states has contributed to a marked tendency among writers to turn away from political themes. That Zhdanovist Socialist Realism is now discredited is all to the good; that socialist writers should no longer be afraid of formal experimentation is also a healthy sign. The onus now lies on these writers to demonstrate what is surely true: that art and commitment are not incompatible.

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CHAPTER 16

Avant-garde Literature and the Evolution of Capitalist Society

The late Lucien Goldmann*

I

Considered today, after the turning-point represented by the events in France during May and June 1968, the *avant-garde* literature of Europe of the years from 1945 to 1968 takes on a much clearer and more coherent aspect than previously. It appears, in fact, that the main question with which this literature had been confronting us, explicitly or implicitly, was the nature of the social relationships that had developed in Europe since before World War I. Did these relationships constitute a temporary phenomenon; or did they represent an enduring social order, with regard to which philosophers, artists, and authors had to take up a definite position?

The epoch in question appears to us now to have been one of transition following upon two important periods in the history of Western capitalism: that of liberal capitalism; and that of imperialism, the capitalism of monopolies and trusts—the period of capitalism in its critical phase. The transition was from the state of equilibrium assured by the market under liberal capitalism to the period of state intervention and planning that characterizes the Second Industrial Revolution. The latter has already brought into being mechanisms to achieve economic equilibrium; but it has not yet found corresponding social structures.

The period of liberal capitalism was above all characterized by the union of two partial structures, between which a more or less intricate balance was established: an *authoritarian and hierarchical* structure controlling business firms, which closely reflected family life with its image of the father as the head of the family; and a *democratic and egalitarian* structure as regards the market (with the exception, of course, of the labour market). This latter structure was reflected, through the body of leading citizens, in political and social life and also—it is important to note—in the university and (to a lesser extent) in the leaving classes of the *lycées*. Higher education, which was reserved for privileged persons but was nevertheless liberal and critical, represented for middle-class sons a rite of transition from childhood to citizenship, from authoritarian subjection to democracy.

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* Formerly Director of Studies, École Pratique des Hautes Études (VI Section), Sorbonne.

The second period of monopolies and trusts upset the mechanism of the market, suppressing thereby the possibility of a spontaneous and relatively enduring recovery of equilibrium in the economy. This period was marked by serious crises in the economic, social, and political spheres, during the course of which equilibrium has been only intermittently established in an extremely unstable and temporary fashion—to be lost again immediately afterwards. This was the period of World War I, the social and political crises of 1921–3, the economic crisis of 1929–33, the fascist seizure of power in Germany, and World War II—not to mention events close to the borders of the industrialized countries, e.g. in Italy and Spain. It was this period that saw the emergence of a new philosophy and literature of anguish and alienation, which have come to be known generically as "existentialist."

Now, the years that followed World War II constitute a new turning-point in the history of Western capitalism. The bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented not only a considerable escalation in the barbarism of war, but also the first public display of nuclear fission, and the heralding of the Second Industrial Revolution. This latter has since developed and entailed vast technical, economic, social, and political changes. One of the most important has been the development, this time consciously, of a mechanism to regulate the market by means of state planning and state-institutional planning (we employ the latter term to designate collaboration between the state and the large industrial corporations, which is characteristic of most western capitalist countries).

The intervention of the state in economic life has considerably curtailed the democratic and egalitarian sector of social life, and replaced it by a hierarchical structure, like that which has always existed in industry, particularly in its principal foyer, the business firm. Social and political institutions, though outwardly unchanged, have weakened internally. Parliaments, for example, have continued to exist; but not only have they lost, and continue to lose, a considerable measure of their importance, but even the nature of parliamentary elections has been profoundly modified, through the development of propaganda by means of the mass media, and above all through changes in the social situation of the electors. Among the latter, the class of independent, leading citizens has been progressively reduced, to be replaced by what we call the salaried middle class, who, although they occupy corresponding positions in the scale of incomes, are for the most part executives subject to the hierarchical authority of their superiors or to the board of directors of their firm.

At the same time, however, as this society has become one of the most hierarchical and authoritarian that western Europe has experienced, it has been possible to reduce external coercion to a minimum. This is because its place has been taken by subjective internal coercion, and because hierarchy and authority have been accepted as desirable. The basis for this internalization is to be found not in psycho-analysis, but in the augmentation of incomes and of the material standard of living that the planned society has been able to assure for the majority of its members, including the working class. The basic characteristic of this society is the transformation of men into passive, well-paid executives, who have accepted the hierarchical structure of social and economic life, and do not question it so long as they are in a position to go away for holidays and purchase a refrigerator, a television set, a motor-car, on credit.

Besides these surface manifestations, we must note also a less conspicuous transformation, which is allowing structures of consciousness to develop that have for long remained a hidden human potentiality, and of which recent events have constituted the first outer demonstration. Technical progress, which has been the basis for all these economic and social changes, has rendered more and more inoperative, by virtue of its mere presence, the majority of the restraints and frustrations that were justified in previous ages by the need to maintain a relatively low standard of living for the majority of society's members in order to ensure investment and technical progress.

As a result of these changes, and especially of the disappearance of the class of independent leading citizens who provided its mainstay, the liberal and critical university, which had flourished in the liberal capitalist era and was more or less maintained during the period of crisis up to 1945, gradually gave way to a university more adapted to the technocratic society. The hierarchical principle, which had always been present in some degree, was intensified, and the intellectual level lowered, as one-way transmission of knowledge encouraged passive and docile apprenticeship. This transformation was greatly helped by the considerable growth of the student body (following upon the raising of the standard of living throughout the middle class), and by the much more limited increase in the number of teachers. This created such a disproportion that authoritarian teaching ensued almost inevitably; and it imposed itself all the more readily because the technocratic society specifically needed passive specialists limited to their field and narrow in cultural outlook.

At the same time, however, and as a consequence of this same disappearance of the class of leading independent citizens, a contrary change was taking place in family life. The replacement of the independent producer and of the head of the firm by employed executives—intermediaries accustomed to obedience and to carrying out directives, and not to taking decisions or imposing their own wills—necessarily involved a lessening of paternal authority, the effacement of the father as head of the family, and a considerable liberalization as regards the education of the children; a liberalization that, moreover, is in line with deep-rooted tendencies of modern society, albeit as yet unrealized.

Thus, the university ceased to be a place where a young man escaped from the submission of the family circle into a sphere of liberty and equality established by the critical mind. The university, at the very moment when it became socially more important because it embraced a greater number (of both sexes) from wider sections of the population, became a place of transition from a family life already much freer and more adapted to the modern world, to the outdated and hybrid world of authoritarian social relationships represented by the technocratic society in its phase of transition. This, probably, was one of the most important causes of the social explosion that we witnessed, especially in France, in 1968.

II

Before analysing the ways in which creative writers have expressed these social changes, let us consider how other intellectuals, particularly philosophers and sociologists, have reacted to them. Three fundamental attitudes emerge in the philosophical and sociological theories of the period, and these we shall encounter also, to a certain extent, in contemporary imaginative literature.

One group has seen the social and historical conflicts primarily in political terms of the kind that were current in the inter-war years. It was a struggle, on one side, to transform democratic institutions into authoritarian ones, and on the other, to oppose such state machinery by the organization of equally disciplined, hierarchical forces of opposition or revolution. These theorists take it for granted that discipline and authority are socially and historically effective. Within this group, one can distinguish conservative thinkers from various partisans of revolution; but neither group is very relevant to our present concerns. (It seems to us that the most important works written from this point of view are the revolutionary novels of André Malraux.) Finally, there are those thinkers who, while acknowledging this vision of the world and of society, base their works on the possibility of reconciling such values with the moral demands and existential values of the individual. We encounter this problematic approach in the dramatic works of Sartre.

A second important group has been formed by those sociologists and philosophers who have abandoned the traditional schematic theory of the class struggle, and affirmed the success of self-adjusting economic and social mechanisms in the contemporary phase of capitalism; they too have stressed the rise in the standard of living, and the internalization of restraints and obedience to the hierarchy. Deceived by the façade and the appearances of our technocratic society, they have asserted that a radical break with the past has taken place, a rupture that they have analysed in either euphoric or despairing terms. If we leave aside for a moment such questions of value judgment, there is no important difference as regards theory between the analytical apologetics of Raymond Aron or of Daniel Bell in *The End of Ideology* (1960), the more neutral statements of David Riesman, who sought to be objective in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), and the pessimistic critique of the Frankfurt School, which reached its highest point in Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1963). There are also differences of level, of course, as well as differences of evaluation, in the analyses offered by these writers. Nevertheless, as theorists they have one thing in common: they all believe that mechanisms of self-adjustment have succeeded in establishing a substantial and enduring integration of the different social classes within industrial society. As a result, they do not see any place in this society for radical criticism or dispute—or hope.

In connection with this second group we should also mention one particularly important movement in contemporary thought: non-genetic structuralism, represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucauld, and others. These writers no longer pose the problem of the relations between man and his social and historical situation; they quite simply deny the existence of the subject and of history. Thus, they are exponents, at an extremely elaborate theoretical level, of the integrated view of society.

Finally, there is a third group of theorists, represented by several Italian socialists, such as Victor Foa and Bruno Trentin, and in France principally by Serge Mallet, André Gorz, and by our own sociology of cultural creativity. This group maintains that social integration is only the visible aspect of an evolutionary process that also carries within itself a deep need to go beyond its present limits. Thus, the Second Industrial Revolution and its social repercussions are expected to result in a radical democratic restructuring of social relationships based on the concept of their regulating themselves automatically.

III

As examples of *avant-garde* writing in the period since 1945, we may conveniently take the theatre in France and in particular the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, and Witold Gombrowicz. Many other writers might be reviewed besides, did not space forbid it, and indeed a favourite example in this context is Samuel Beckett. He is discussed more fully elsewhere,* but we may usefully mention him here because the use to which he has been put by Theodor W. Adorno exemplifies the problem of method and of value judgment that we have discussed above. Adorno cites Beckett as the modern writer *par excellence*, but hears in his style only the tone of despair, the expression of society's inhumanity, the absence of personal contacts or hope for the future. We believe that an essential dimension of Beckett's writing may have escaped Adorno's notice, namely, the way in which the inhumanity and the vacuum are transformed into something not tragic, but humorous and sometimes ridiculous. To employ a rather inadequate type of critical jargon (which we hope shortly to improve upon), we might say that Beckett's words only "denote" a desperate state of existence, but more profoundly "connote" a warm, human, even hopeful confidence in the community.

Sartre and Genet each began by writing a novel, and only afterwards turned to the theatre. With both of them, moreover, this transition from fiction to drama coincides with a change in the problems dealt with: from those that centre on the individual to broader questions of history, oppression, and revolution. It is interesting also that Sartre again tried in a multi-volume novel, *Les chemins de la liberté* (1945–9; The Roads to Freedom), which remains unfinished, to tackle the problems of history and of politics; and Genet attempted in his first play, *Haute surveillance*

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* See Ch. 4, "Absurd Art, Absurd Man, Absurd Heroes."

(1947; Deathwatch), to continue with the private problems of his earlier novels. In both cases only a moderate success was achieved, and few critics today would place *Les chemins de la liberté* on the same literary level as *La nausée* (1938; Nausea), or *Haute surveillance* in the same rank as *Les bonnes* (1947; The Maids), *Le balcon* (1956; The Balcony), *Les nègres* (1958; The Blacks), or *Les paravents* (1961; The Screens).

In his dramas, Jean-Paul Sartre (b. 1905) remains a traditionalist as regards style and technique; there is no formal innovation, as there is in his early prose work (*La nausée* represents an important step in the history of the French novel). The reason for this may be found in the character of Sartre's ideas. *La nausée* expressed for the first time in France one of the problematic issues essential both to his own later philosophy—as developed in *L'être et le néant* (1943; Being and Nothingness)—and to the contemporary novel: the disappearance of the self or fictitious personage. Later, as Georg Lukács has pointed out, Sartre reverted to a more traditional way of thinking, which was much closer to Kantian ethics: there is free choice only when one chooses the freedom of all men. Sartre, who, as we have said, changes over from narrative prose to drama in order to express this new vision, returns also to a range of problems, and consequently to a "form," that are much more traditional. From *Les mouches* (1943; The Flies) to *Les séquestrés d'Altona* (1959; Loser Wins), the drama of Sartre is—with some rare exceptions such as *Huis-clos* (1944; In Camera) and *La putain respectueuse* (1946; The Respectable Prostitute)—concerned with the relationship between individual ethics or individual action and the revolution; and these basic elements (revolution, ethics, individual action) are conceived in traditional terms. The revolution in these dramas is that of 1917; it is presented from the communist and even Stalinist point of view, and connected with a disciplined and amoral political party that accepts all the compromises required for the sake of efficacy. The ethics have an individualistic and Kantian character. Thus, the action of Orestes (in *Les mouches*) retains all the characteristics of the individualism of the Age of Enlightenment. Under these circumstances, there was no convincing aesthetic reason to modify the traditional dramatic form in order to express a vision and range of problems sufficiently close to those that had originally engendered it.

This is not to deny that Sartre is an important thinker, and indeed an entirely authentic writer. But when we compare him with Beckett, Genet, or Gombrowicz, it is clear that he is one of the last thinkers and writers representative of the period of monopolistic capitalism in its critical phase, that he has found himself writing in a period of technocratic capitalism, and that he has not attempted to follow the fashion of the day by making innovations in his form and style.

The shift in Sartre's own thinking from amoral individualism to Kantian moralism did not represent merely an individual phenomenon. It was closely bound up with the social situation in which Sartre lived, and with the Occupation and the Resistance in particular. His first play, *Les mouches*, transposes to a classical setting, but in a quite transparent manner, the political situation in France at the time when it was written. At the first performances, the majority of the spectators certainly perceived the association between Argos oppressed by a usurper who forces it to live in remorse, and occupied France; between Orestes, Electra, and the Resistance. The play would long have ceased to attract any interest had not Sartre posed in it one of the basic problems of his thinking, which we meet again in almost all his theatrical works: the relationship between the individual and the revolutionary struggle.

Sartre's Orestes is no longer the Greek personage, protected by Apollo, who seeks above all to avenge his father. He is an intellectual, who resembles very closely the *normaliens* and *anciens normaliens* of 1942–3. He has studied philosophy with a master who epitomizes the university outlook of the first half of the 20th century: sceptical, individualistic, free of prejudice, but understanding little of human and social reality. This philosopher cannot grasp that the gods really exist and that they constitute an essential part of the machinery of oppression and lies that governs the world; he speculates *ad infinitum* on the freedom of thought, but ignores actual oppression and tyranny. Under his influence, Orestes has changed his name; he is now called Philèbe and no longer thinks about such outmoded and barbarous things as, for instance, avenging his assassinated father. He returns to Argos instinctively, and without really knowing why. He is accompanied by two personages who are alarmed at the consequences that this journey could have: the philosopher, who fears that he may forget all that he has learnt and fall back into the old prejudices—the desire to kill Aegisthus and to avenge Agamemnon—and Jupiter, who, on the contrary, fears that Orestes may discover reality and pass beyond mere thinking about the world, to become a truly free man.

In the end, Orestes does kill Aegisthus, not merely in order to avenge his father (he has gone beyond such prejudices), but because he discovers the tyranny and oppression that, through the murder, have been set up in Argos and the slavery to which Electra and his fellow-citizens of Argos have been reduced. He finds his real roots and his fulfilment in taking part in the struggle for the freedom of men. And thus he discovers Jupiter, the incarnation of the gods of oppression, allies of tyranny, masters of technology, and of political jugglery; powerful and terrible for those who accept them, but totally powerless when confronted by the man who chooses to fight for freedom.

Orestes kills Aegisthus in order to liberate the city and his fellow-citizens. In reality, however—and here we see one of the basic elements of Sartre's philosophy at this time—there is no collective action. In fighting for the freedom of others, Orestes has found only his own freedom. The inhabitants of Argos—even Electra, who has not acted, but only dreamt the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra—do not understand it and remain under the sway of Jupiter and the Erinyes. Orestes leaves Argos a free and solitary man; but he has already been overcome by the eclipse of his mind, the madness that in the play takes the place of physical death—an inevitable limitation in Sartre's philosophy of individual free choice—although he has at the same time, by virtue of this choice, made the first successful sally against the oppressive reign of the tyrants and the gods.

Sartre does posit the possibility of collective action in one play, which has been not very successful because it lacks unity, but which we may mention in passing, *Morts sans sépultures* (1946; Men without Shadows). The possibility is presented solely at the level of a small group and of its immediate tasks. A group of Resistance men under arrest, who face the torturers together, constitute an interdependent team; each of its members is engaged in a single action that is at the same time the group's common task. This very solidarity, however, separates them from the totality of the Resistance movement, and breaks the bonds between Lucie and Jean, the man whom she loves, a fighter like herself, and leader of the combat group. The torturers are unaware of his identity, however, and they do not include him in the group that is tortured.

The three plays that revert to the problem of the relationship between the individual and revolutionary or collective action, *Les mains sales* (1948; Crime Passionel), *Le diable et le bon Dieu* (1951; Lucifer and the Lord), and *Les séquestrés d'Altona*, are, in contrast to *Les mouches* and *Morts sans sépultures*, centred on the conflict between ethics and efficacy, and on the impossibility of resolving it. Sartre's refusal of reconciliation or synthesis is not new. He comes to essentially the same conclusion as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Marx. He shows us that, in itself, radical individualism is amoral, and likewise any philosophy that admits a subject transcending the individual (be this conceived as God or as Collectivity). To insist on the priority of ethics—which is to say, on the relationship man-God, or man-absolute—is to insist on a *tragic* relationship. To give priority to ethics is to subscribe to a tragic philosophy. Or, conversely, tragic philosophies have an essentially moral basis.

Les mains sales includes three main characters: Hoederer the politician, Jessica the judge, and, at the end, Hugo, the individual who opts for morality and truth. The role played by Jessica we shall find repeated in later plays—by the couple Catherine-Hylda in *Le diable et le bon Dieu*, and by Johanna in *Les séquestrés d'Altona*—and it is a vital element in the dramatic structure; for these plays affirm, at the same time, the necessity of morality and of efficacy, and the impossibility of achieving their synthesis. These plays are, however, not tragic—for tragedy affirms the absolute priority of morality and does not recognize any value in efficacy or in compromise—and they finish therefore with an answer that is not entirely satisfying. (It is in this fact, moreover, that their existentialist character resides.) The constituent elements of the dramatic structure are: first, the inadequate individuals, ignorant and bereft of conscience, slaves of their prejudices and of their fixed ideas—Hugo (before the final scene), Olga, and Louis in *Les mains sales*, the Peasants, the Banker, the Bishop, and others in *Le diable et le bon Dieu*, Werner and some of the minor parts in *Les séquestrés d'Altona*); and second, the self-conscious and humanly acceptable individuals, who are divided into three groups—those who choose efficacy (Hoederer, Nasty, and Frantz after his enlistment into the army), those who choose morality (Hugo in the final scene, Goetz until the final scene in *Le diable et le bon Dieu*, Johanna, and Frantz during the first part of his life), and finally, a personage who does not have much to do with the action, but who judges and decides upon the solution to be adopted, and whom Sartre, starting with *Les mains sales*, has incorporated in the women, such as Jessica.

In *Les mains sales* Hoederer the revolutionary politician and enlightened humanist, who is anxious to cherish human lives and to pursue the most useful policies for the collectivity, is killed—at the instance of Olga and Louis, incompetent and unrealistic politicians—by Hugo, a *salaud* (villain) with no conscience who is dominated by his personal problems. Jessica, in spite of her sheltered and superficial upbringing and of the ignorance in which she has always been kept, is never mistaken and always perceives clearly, partly because she never esteems nor loves Hugo, whereas she is attracted by Hoederer from the time of their first meeting (she leaves her husband after the assassination).

At the end, when Hugo comes out of prison, he meets Olga and Louis, who, having organized the assassination of Hoederer, now know that the latter had held correct views. They support his politics and, understandably, wish to erase all trace of the murder that they instigated in the name of the party. Hugo finds himself confronted by the choice either of joining them, admitting that he killed Hoederer out of jealousy, and thus continuing to live; or of affirming that he carried it out under orders from the party, and thus signing his own death warrant (he will have to be killed in order to wipe out all trace of an act that has become politically embarrassing). His choice is made easier because he had been persuaded by Hoederer to renounce his mission at first, and had only fired when, on returning home, he found his wife in Hoederer's arms. The real act has thus become ambivalent, and only his present choice decides its true significance. Moreover, there is no doubt as to the choice Hoederer himself would have made if he had found himself in Hugo's place. As a politician indifferent to all abstract morality and concerned only with human efficacy, he had many times repeated that only ideas and acts count, and not individuals, and that if he were to be killed it would be necessary above all to continue to struggle for the policies that had appeared valid to him.

After having been judged and condemned by Jessica, Hugo, who becomes aware of his previous failings, has to make a choice not only between the two possible interpretations of his act, but, above all, between loyalty toward the ideas of Hoederer and the defence of the latter's memory, the defence of the individual Hoederer against all that he had done and thought. It is the choice between morality and politics, between truth and efficacy. His choice—which at that instant is also Sartre's—is unequivocal: he chooses truth and morality in the face of politics and efficacy. Declaring himself beyond redemption, Hugo opens the door and advances toward the men who will kill him.

The opposite solution is presented in *Le diable et le bon Dieu.* Goetz, the *salaud*, is a moralist who wants to act at all costs in accordance with a general and absolute law. He refuses all compromise in the trial that he is conducting between God, on the one hand, and on the other himself and his double, Heinrich, who is his conscience and a priest, and who wants at the same time to defend the people and to remain loyal to the Church. Confronting and opposing them is Nasty, the political leader of the peasants in revolt (and the play's counterpart to Hoederer). He is deeply humane and concerned with efficacy in the noblest sense of the word, namely, with defending the oppressed. During the course of the play, Goetz tries out all possible forms of moral behaviour: that is to say, of behaviour related to God. He chooses, first, to incorporate absolute evil, to be evil for evil's sake; but he discovers that all it amounts to is that he is playing the game of the oppressors. Then he goes to the opposite extreme and chooses to do good for its own sake, only to discover that he is still playing their game for them. So he turns to the third possibility of moral behaviour: retreat into solitude and withdrawal from all action. However, he discovers that "not to act" is also a form of action and, like all moral action measured with reference to the absolute, it favours the cause of the strong against the weak, nobles against peasants. Finally, when he has understood that no moral action is possible, that God does not exist, and that there is no trial, he kills Heinrich (his double, his conscience), accepts lies, and rejoins Nasty's organization, in which, after offering to serve as a simple soldier, he accepts the post of military chief.

Viewed theoretically, the solution is evidently the opposite of that presented in *Les mains sales*; and we may recall that this was the time when Sartre allied himself to the Communist Party and wrote several articles favourable to them. The literary emphasis of the play, however, still falls on the dilemma of the individual who is trying to act in an exclusively ethical manner. The winning-over of Goetz to Nasty's camp is barely indicated at the end. Indeed, nowhere in Sartre's plays do we find a man who has chosen efficacy and been also fully integrated, in a valid way, into a revolutionary organization. The character who most closely resembles this type is Hoederer; but, as we know, he is at variance with the party and he allows himself to be killed at the party's orders. In this context it is interesting to note that the two plays, *Kean* (1954) and *Nekrassov* (1955), that Sartre wrote during the period that followed, when he was closest—both as a thinker and as a politician—to the Communist Party, do not confront us with the militant who is integrated into the organization and the collective struggle; but, by a reversal of values, with the cheat or gifted actor playing a part that does not correspond to what he is in reality. Sartre seems never sufficiently close to the Communist Party to translate the relationship in a creative way into his theatrical works.

Finally, after the death of Stalin and the period of de-Stalinization, Sartre took up once more the problem of the relationship between ethics and efficacy in one of his most successful and important plays: *Les séquestrés d'Altona.* It is the history of Frantz von Gerlach, who joined the German army, took part in the torturing, and after the war shut himself up in his room, refusing to admit that the defeat of Germany had not been a disaster and that his country, reconciled with its enemies and conquerors, was now experiencing an economic boom. We may distinguish three levels of meaning in this situation. First, Frantz von Gerlach is a German officer; although Sartre had always combatted Fascism, he is a man, and thus in spite of his anti-fascist attitude he carries a responsibility, no matter how indirect, for all that men have done in any part of the world. The name Frantz, however, has associations with "French," and when the play was performed for the first time, the majority of the spectators certainly understood that it also confronted them with the problem of torture during the war in Algeria. Sartre had campaigned courageously in the open against the torturing; but as a Frenchman taking part in national life, he also assumed a certain responsibility, again of a very indirect kind. Finally—and this is perhaps the most profound significance of the play—von Gerlach was, in reality, the name of a German anti-fascist.* De-Stalinization and the 20th Party Congress made public the fact that the Communist Party, with which Sartre had declared his solidarity for years, had also used torture, and here the problem concerned him directly.

Les séquestrés d'Altona is interesting also because it introduces, alongside ethical and political attitudes similar to those in the earlier plays, a striking individualist of a new type: the father of Frantz, who represents the individualism of the classical bourgeoisie, one might even say of the Renaissance. Old von Gerlach is indifferent alike to the values of ethics, of humanism, or of collective efficacy; he utilizes the forces in power, irrespective of their nature—formerly they were national socialist, now they are American—in order to promote his interests and to enlarge his influence. He is anxious to become "king" and to make his son a "prince" who will succeed him. But he discovers that modern society has inflicted upon him the most terrible and radical defeat. For in this society there are no longer princes or kings, but only institutions; it is the von Gerlach works that are omnipotent, and that men serve, but that they no longer know how to control or to dominate. Since he has discovered this, his life has no meaning, and in his eyes there is no future either for himself or for his descendants. This expresses itself both in his throat cancer and in his behaviour as a nobleman who seeks to end his days elegantly with Frantz, the son whom he loves (Werner, the other son, is ineffectual, a character of no importance) and whom he wishes to snatch away from a world that is absurd and lacking in meaning.

Frantz, however, has locked himself in a room at the top of the house and refuses to speak to his father, whom he despises. From the start, he had rebelled against his father's collaboration with the national socialists. Having attempted to adopt the normal attitude of Hugo or Goetz, he wanted to risk his life in order to save a rabbi who had escaped from a concentration camp that his father had allowed to be built on land that he had transferred to the state. Like Goetz, however, he soon discovered that a moral attitude was impossible. The Jew was killed in front of him; but nothing happened to the son of the powerful von Gerlach. Disgusted, and yet fascinated by efficacy and force, he had rejoined the German army and had gone to the farthest extreme in accepting all compromises, including torture, in the name of efficacy. However, efficacy soon proved itself to be illusory, because Germany was defeated; his behaviour lost all justification and became a mere mistake, besides being an abominable crime. So Frantz shut himself in his room at the top of the house, blocked up the window, and broke off all contact with the outside world, after he had decided that the defeat of Germany signified the country's total destruction, and misery and famine for all survivors. There he spends his life, pleading his cause and that of others like himself against those for whom and in whose name torture had been justified—the people of the 30th century, who will perhaps be Crabs.

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* Sartre informs us in the Preface that he knew this but that he had forgotten the fact when he was in process of writing the play.

It is obviously a trial without conclusion, because the Crabs never reply and Frantz knows, without wanting to admit it to himself, that he can defend himself, in the name of efficacy, only by lying and breaking off all contact with the real world. He is in this situation when he meets Johanna, who, at another level and without ever having betrayed human and moral values, has experienced failure herself. They fall in love, and this love leads Frantz to want to rediscover life and the future. This he can do only if Johanna accepts him. She, indeed, will be the judge instead of the Crabs; a real living judge who will really pronounce sentence. Johanna, who loves Frantz as much as he loves her, assures him of her love and solidarity; she will do anything to save him. When she learns that he has been a torturer, however, she refuses to live with him; she could not accept anyone who had betrayed mankind and human values.

Hugo had chosen morality, and Goetz efficacy, but Frantz discovers that each of these choices is just as unrealistic as the individualism of his father. He rejoins his father and they go to die together, having freely chosen and accepted death; on stage, a recording gives us his intellectual testament. The people of the 30th century will probably be men and not Crabs, and they certainly will not be able to condemn the men of today, any more than one can condemn one's mother; but that neither excuses nor justifies the present century. In a world where one and one make one—because when one man meets another the stronger kills the weaker, and when he sees the fierce beast in the eyes of his dying enemy he sees himself—the future can never justify anything and there is nothing further for life or action to achieve. In this last important play with its radical pessimism Sartre, who had begun with quite different attitudes, draws close to those of Adorno and Marcuse.*

IV

Sartre's theatrical works put the problem of man in society into a perspective that was valid up to 1945, but that no longer corresponds to present-day reality. Sartre is without doubt a great writer, and probably the most important French philosophical thinker alive; but as a dramatist he cannot be said to represent the *avant-garde* in the way that Genet does.

Starting with *Les bonnes*, Jean Genet (b. 1910)—and this is the main characteristic of his plays—totally ignores individuals. The forces that confront one another in his theatrical works are always collective ones: the Maids, and Monsieur and Madame; the Insurgents, the insignificant people who come into the *maison d'illusions* (the term is French slang for brothel), and the powerful people on the balcony; the Blacks and the Whites; the group of nonconformists—Saïd, Leila, and the mother—and the social classes of the Colonizers, of the Victorious Colonized, and of the Dead. Whereas Sartre's plays concentrate on the individual and always refer to the time of the hero, Genet's plays penetrate the historical dimension of collective forces, and represent the conflict between the weak and the strong, the dominated and the dominant.

Another important characteristic that makes Genet a more modern writer than Sartre is the way he represents organization, order, and discipline in his plays. He shows them not on the side of the progressive forces and capable of defending man (as they may have been in former times), but either on the side of the dominant and of repression, or on the side of the dominated as an element of weakness or of failure.

Genet's plays focus on the relationship between the dominated and the dominant, exploring the possibility of transforming this relationship, and showing that this transformation is meaningful only as far as it remains closely bound up with liberty, with recognition of the right for free expression, and with the development of criticism and of nonconformity.

* Afterwards (1965) he wrote *Les troyennes*, an adaptation of *The Trojan Women* of Euripides, a history of barbarism in which the strong destroy the weak, and this finishes with the hope that the gods will punish the former.

We find a pattern in the world of his plays: a pattern to which *Les bonnes* and *Le balcon* correspond completely, and which is more or less modified in *Les nègres*, and especially in *Les paravents*. The pattern is established by the ambivalent antagonism existing between dominated and dominant, a mixture of hatred and fascination that the former feel for the latter. The dominated feel hatred primarily because oppression makes their life so sordid and insupportable that no communal or other authentic feeling could exist, but also because the dominant are odious and ridiculous, dupes of their own lies, puppets who lack conscience. They feel fascination because these puppets are powerful and invincible; nothing can be changed in this reality, which is both false and insuperable. In this situation, and faced with the impossibility of overcoming the dominant, the dominated take refuge in the imaginary, the only basically human and authentic sphere that can still subsist. In *Les bonnes*, *Le balcon*, and *Les nègres*, the dominated periodically celebrate a ritual in which they play at both destroying and becoming the dominant.

Some critics have seen Genet as a writer who portrays the beauty and authenticity of the imaginary as opposed to the lying and sordid character of reality. This analysis is insufficient, as these critics discover when they come up against the difficulty of the end of *Les bonnes* and *Le balcon*, where the participants in the ritual end by killing themselves. One critic has then gone on to say that Genet is a great author at the beginning of his plays, but that his creative power diminishes toward the end! In fact, ritual and the imaginary exist for Genet only in relation to a reality that the dominated want but cannot transform. Far from being able to rest in the imaginary, Solange, Claire, and Roger have no way out but suicide. One does not find this suicide again either in *Les nègres* or in *Les paravents*, because hope and a prospect of transformation have made their appearance in the world of these two plays.

Let us consider the unfolding of the action. In *Les bonnes* its expression is reduced to the simplest and barest essentials. Claire and Solange play every evening at being Madame and also at killing her. In this ritual Claire plays the part of Madame, and Solange that of Claire, although this distribution of roles is not rigorously maintained. Their real existence is sordid and degrades everything that they touch, including the love that they experience for the Milkman. There is nothing beautiful or tolerable in the reality of their everyday lives. In ritual and imagination, however, their existence becomes dramatic and even pathetic. This ritual alone makes their life tolerable and permits them to slake a thirst for grandeur of which the dominant are unaware.

This difference is expressed particularly clearly in two passages in which the Maids and Madame say the same thing, but in an essentially different way. The Maids, in fact, have falsely denounced Monsieur, who has been arrested. Identifying themselves with Madame, they experience in their imagination a deep and genuine love for Monsieur, in imagining that he will be deported and that they will follow him into prison. A little later Madame arrives and says the same thing, but this time it is ridiculous and odious, because Madame does not believe it and it is only idle babble. Moreover, she begins by saying, "Monsieur will get himself out," and by virtue of this alone everything else becomes a simple conditional. She declares that she is no longer interested in her dresses or her furs, which she will give to the Maids, nor in the household accounts, but at the very moment when she learns that Monsieur has been set free she asks for the return of the accounts and takes back her gifts, thus demonstrating that she has never ceased to think about them. Characteristic of her is the exclamation with which she concludes the tirade: ". . . oh, I'm dying for a cigarette!" Clearly, Madame is nothing but a clown.

But, of course, the dominant are in reality powerful. The Maids have tried to kill Madame but they have never succeeded; likewise their denunciation miscarries and Monsieur is set free. It becomes evident that the Maids will be discovered and condemned, and that they will not even be able to continue their daily ritual. A final attempt to kill Madame proves as ineffectual as the others; for the world, the whole of reality, even objects themselves, conspire against them. The only way that remains to them of avoiding defeat is to destroy themselves. Claire, who plays the part of Madame, requires Solange to present to her in a solemn manner, and in the most valuable cup, the poison that she will drink; Solange stands motionless facing the audience with her hands crossed as though wearing handcuffs.

Earlier the text informs us that Solange, by reason of her condemnation, is no longer a simple Maid but " . . . Mademoiselle Solange Lemercier . . . the equal of Madame who walks with her head held high . . ."; also that she has become an autonomous being for all eternity. She foresees the future burial of Claire at which Madame will play her part, ridiculous as ever. She also sees her own execution and burial to come.

Before her death, Claire says to her:

> ". . . We shall go on to the end. You will be alone to assume both our existences. You will need much strength. . . . And especially, when you

> are condemned, do not forget that you are carrying me within you;—a precious burden. We shall be beautiful, free, and joyous. Solange, we do not have a minute to lose. . . ."[1]

From a human and psychological point of view the Maids have undoubtedly achieved victory against the powerful marionette Madame. Their make-believe life has a genuineness, a passion, a reality that Madame's so-called real life lacks. But such has been the case from the beginning of the play, and nothing could be changed in this situation. Madame cannot be overcome; and in order to conserve the importance and genuineness of their existence, the Maids have had to destroy themselves; but this self-destruction has become an apotheosis.

The world of *Le balcon* presents a counterpart to that of *Les bonnes* but is much more highly structured and complex. Into the *maison d'illusions* insignificant people come every day to act out a ritual of identification; they act the parts of the powerful—the Bishop, the Judge, and the General. Outside, other insignificant people have triggered off a revolt; they are celebrating the ritual of destroying the powerful: a ritual because the revolt is doomed in advance, and has no chance of achieving victory. The play ends in a way similar to *Les bonnes*: with the self-mutilation of Roger, the leader of the rebels, and with the establishing of the reign of the Chief of Police for 1000 years.

However, into this world (which differs from that of *Les bonnes* only in one respect: the two elements of ritual, identification and destruction, have now been separated to become two autonomous rituals) Genet has introduced a future, a historical perspective, which we should now pause to consider. It is a curious fact, which poses problems for the sociologist, that this historical perspective is the strict literary transposition of historical events that Genet has probably not experienced himself, but that explain the character of the society he is evoking.*

Although the nonentities in *Le balcon* come to play at being persons of significance, the real power at the *maison d'illusions*, in which the action takes place and which represents the world, belongs to Madame Irma and her partner, the Chief of Police, both of whom are obsessed by the fact that no one has ever come and asked to play the part of the latter. The action will show us how this long-expected event comes about, thanks to the menace of the revolt and its final defeat.

If we reflect a little on this seemingly unusual story, we perceive that it transposes, in a fairly exact manner, the real history of Western societies and the growing importance of the executive. For our grandparents, and perhaps even for our parents, the image of power was embodied in the heads of the Church, of Justice, and of the Army; in historical reality, a radical transformation had already transferred this power a long time previously to the owners of the means of production and to the executive. As Genet states, the Western world really took cognizance of the transformation as a result of the crisis and revolutionary menace that followed World War I—a menace that ended, as in *Le balcon*, in defeat.

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* An analogous situation is found (as we have indicated elsewhere) in Goethe's *Faust* and—as we shall be pointing out later—in *Le mariage* by Gombrowicz.

We may conveniently mention at this point a comparable transposition of events by Witold Gombrowicz (1904–69) in his play *Le mariage* (1965). In his case the events are those in central Europe, where revolution has been successful, but they have led no less surely to the omnipotence of the executive. *Le mariage* (which the critics found dream-like and incoherent) presents two young soldiers, Henri and Jeannot, who have returned from the war and discover, close to a ruined church, a place and people who seem at the same time familiar and unknown to them. Actually, it is the family home, which has become an inn. The father and mother of Henri have been reduced to being innkeepers and his *fiancée* has become a waitress and prostitute. Their world is degraded, and this has come about as the result of the menace of a drunkard whom everyone fears; but he, in his turn, is scared by the immobility of the father's face.

In this situation of reciprocal menace and fear, Henri (and Jeannot with him) takes sides with religion and the father. Immediately, order and society are re-established, the drunkard is put into prison, the father becomes king, the mother queen, and preparations are made for the legitimate marriage of Henri with his *fiancée*, who has again become a princess.

During these preparations, however, the drunkard escapes and returns to the Court. He explains that he is the priest of a human religion that is worldly and savage, and he suggests to Henri that he become his ally for the purpose of re-establishing legitimacy. Henri accepts, and at that very moment, the drunkard becomes the ambassador of a foreign power. Henri, having become king, will put the whole of society in prison, his father, his mother, the bishop, and also the drunkard. But, before disappearing from the scene, the latter unites Jeannot and the *fiancée*.

The all-powerful tyrant Henri wants to re-establish legitimacy with his own might, and to have his marriage celebrated. But his old friend Jeannot, united by the drunkard to the princess, is an obstacle to him. So Henri asks him to commit suicide during the ceremony. The order is carried out, and the corpse of Jeannot is discovered. The marriage is no longer possible now, and no legitimacy will be established. While the corpse is being carried away into the distance, Henri, at the front of the stage, and surrounded by his henchmen—one cannot tell whether he is their master or their prisoner—concludes: "If I am imprisoned here, may my act, somewhere very far away, be raised to the greatest heights! And may the funeral march carry you away!"[2]

If we compare Gombrowicz's play with Genet's, we see that both have taken as their subject the rise to omnipotence of the executive during the course of the revolution, which ends in one case in victory and in the other in defeat. They employ the same image of the brothel and of prostitution to characterize the degradation of society. Finally each of them, while showing the forces of oppression and of the executive to be totally victorious, suggests indirectly—almost like an echo—the continuing movement of history, toward legitimacy for Gombrowicz and toward revolution for Genet. The differences in structure are accounted for by the fact that Gombrowicz, who is an aristocrat, a Christian, and an *émigré* from his native land, writes from the perspective of a class that has disappeared. Thus he recounts to us history that has been suppressed, a grotesque and far-off nightmare; whereas Genet, who writes from the perspective of the dominated, and who continues to live in a world of oppression and the omnipotence of the executive, gives us a play that is intensely alive, poetic, and lyrical.

Let us now return to the action of *Le balcon*. In turns, groups of insignificant people come to the *maison d'illusions* to play at being Bishop, Judge, and General. Each of the scenes puts emphasis on the diverse aspects of the relationship between the real and the imaginary, and on the nature of the latter. The real bishop, always obliged to make compromises in order to accede to his office and to carry out his duties, continually betrays the very essence of his ministry; there is an incompatibility between the exercise of his duties and the essence of his role; thus the only genuine bishop who approaches the essence of his calling is the one who, on the stage, acts the role of Bishop in the *maison d'illusions*. In the same way, the judge, by himself, could never be an authentic judge in a real courtroom. In order to participate in the essence and genuineness, imagination assumes a world divided into dominated and dominant people: the Judge presupposes the criminal, as the Bishop does the penitent and the General the soldiers whom he sends to their death. Finally, the General's scene stresses the genuinely poetic and dramatic nature of the imaginary world in contrast with the insufficient character of the world of reality.

With the Fifth Tableau we come to the real wielders of power, Madame Irma and the Chief of Police, who were formerly in love with one another and now control the *maison d'illusions*. The episode of Carmen gives a representation in miniature of the whole play. She is the favourite prostitute of Madame Irma, who has taken her onto the administration. Carmen is searching for authenticity, however, and that is why she wants to return to the *maison d'illusions*, where she identifies herself with Saint Theresa or with the Immaculate Conception; but she hopes also to attain something genuine in reality through her daughter, whom she has sent away to a boarding-school. Just as the nonentities have had to forgo the revolt in order to retain their fancies, so she has to give up her daughter in order to stay in the ritual.

At the same time we learn that a revolt has broken out in the city. One of the girls, Chantal, has joined the insurgents, who have already killed the real bishop, judge, and general, and perhaps also the queen, the legality of whose symbolic authority has, in any case, been questioned. But, in the *maison d'illusions*, the Chief of Police organizes the Resistance. As a bishop, judge, and general are required, and it is not particularly important to know who will serve in these capacities, it is suggested to the insignificant people who have remained in the *maison d'illusions* that they should assume in reality the roles that up till now they had assumed only in their imagination. By this action, however, they cease to be pathetic and become odious and droll. Madame Irma is to replace the queen.

The scene of the play now moves to the insurgents. Chantal has become the popular muse whose singing symbolizes hope and liberty and stirs the masses to action. The rebels, however, are divided into two groups: one group identifies itself with Chantal and wishes to introduce essential values into real life—liberty, happiness, and song—and the other group, led by Roger (who loves Chantal), recognizes that the revolution has no chance of succeeding unless they disavow (albeit temporarily) man, enthusiasm, and liberty, in order to replace these values with those of organization, order, and discipline.

The revolution is put down, and the dominant people remain victorious. Chantal is killed by the Powerful Ones of the Balcony, who will take over her memory and put her image on their flag. Order is to be restored, and also the splendour of the *maison d'illusions*, which has fallen apart. It is at this juncture that the long-awaited event occurs: someone comes to the *maison d'illusions* and wants to play the part of Chief of Police. It is Roger, the defeated revolutionary, who used to preach organization and power, and who now comes to identify himself with those who really possess them. During the ceremony, however, he realizes that he would not be able to content himself with the imaginary, and he destroys himself. The Chief of

Police, having become a part of the collective mind, enters the mausoleum that has been waiting ready for a long time, and from there he will rule the world for 1000 years. A Slave sings of his glory. Somewhere in the distance the sputtering of machine-gun fire is audible. Irma, who has become queen, asks: "What is it? . . . Are they ours . . . or the rebels? . . . or ?. . . ," and the messenger answers: "Someone dreaming, Madame. . . ."[3]

In *Les nègres* we find, at the beginning of the play, the same world. High up, there is a balcony with white people on it (and, moreover, they are the same as in the preceding play: the Magistrate, the Soldier, the Priest, the Queen, and her Valet); below them are the dominated people, the Blacks. The latter periodically celebrate a ritual of assassinating a white man or woman; into this enters an important element of love and identification.

At the start of the play we are present at the celebration of a ritual that is to terminate with the descent of the Whites and the punishment of the Blacks. But certain new elements appear, which will prove to be of great consequence. For reasons of internal coherence, it is not possible to have the parts of the white men on the balcony played by white actors. The structure of the play, which affirms the radical opposition between Blacks and Whites, would actually be contradicted by a spectacle that would constitute a collaboration of the one group with the other. As Genet informs us, there should at all costs be a White or the symbol of a white man in the theatre; but all the actors are to be Blacks and dominated people. From then on, there is no longer a play within a play on the stage, one sector constituted by imaginative ceremony and another sector representing—on the stage—reality. All the actors on the stage, dominated and dominant, black and white, participate in the ceremony. Reality exists, nevertheless; but it is situated far away off-stage and is connected to the stage through the personage of Ville de Saint-Nazaire, who comes periodically to bring the news. Let it be added that, at the beginning of the play, this reality is constituted by the fact that—as in *Les bonnes* and *Le balcon*—the dominated execute one of their own number.

On stage, the ceremony is enacted by a group of centrifugal personages who all try to escape; Archibald, the moving spirit of the ritual, has to bring them back to their roles. There is, for instance, Neige, who does not want to destroy the Whites because this would transform them into conquered people, into dominated people, and would thereby give them an authentic value ("Chagrin, Sir, is still an adornment for them"[4]). There are the two lovers, Vertu and Village, who would like to renounce the ritual in order to love each other, to whom Archibald has to explain that love is forbidden to the dominated (we recall the love of the Maids for the Milkman) because there are only "white" words to express it, and in order to be able to pronounce them they would have to become integrated into the world of the Whites, who deny them and reject them.

One can observe up to what point, so far, the universe of *Les nègres* is the counterpart of that of *Les bonnes* and *Le balcon*. During the course of the action, however, a new element appears: the hope of victory for the dominated over the dominant. Outside, the Blacks have killed one of their own people; but another is on his way, a new Chief who will possibly lead them to victory. Under these conditions, the ritual changes its function. It is no longer imaginative behaviour validly opposed to a sordid reality; it integrates itself functionally to the positive elements of this reality, to the hope of victory, in becoming a means of turning the attention of the Whites in the audience away from the menace that is developing elsewhere.

Changing its function, the ritual also changes its nature. In place of the descent of the Whites and the anticipated punishment of the Blacks, it terminates, on the contrary, with the condemnation and execution of the former. When this has all been accomplished and the actors of the ritual leave the stage, Village and Vertu take up their own problem again. Significant of the change that has occurred, he tells her of his love for her, and she replies that it is necessary for him to say it in "black" words, which he will have to invent, and not in "white" words. Village replies that this is the most difficult thing to find among all the things that a man can invent, but that he will try, and perhaps succeed in doing so.

Genet's fourth play, *Les paravents*, is possibly the most complex, the richest, and the most unified. It is made up largely of the same elements as the preceding plays. The two wings of the group of revolutionaries have, however, become two autonomous entities: on the one hand, the organized and disciplined revolt that will be victorious, but will by the same token become the instrument of conformity and repression; and on the other hand, the group formed by Saïd, his wife, and his mother, corresponding to Chantal and the revolutionaries, which will remain alert, impossible to conquer or to curb, and which will continue the fight.

The theme of this play is the opposition of the latter group to three successive social orders: that of oppression and conflict between the dominated and the dominant; that of the victorious revolt of the dominated; and that of the dead. Each of these orders, moreover, corresponds to a central concept in the traditional thinking of the radical Left, and especially of the group connected with the journal *Les Temps Modernes*: society divided into classes; the revolutionary classes emerging from the revolution, but having conserved the power of the state; and finally the ideal communist society of the future in which all opposition and antagonism will have been abolished. By way of counterpoint, on the periphery of the main action but bound up with it, there are the secondary and contrasting issues of the brothel and the army.

The play commences with the conflict between the dominated and the dominant, which we recognize from the earlier plays. Saïd, the poorest man of the region, is on his way to marry the ugliest woman, accompanied by his mother. From this first scene on, we see them genuinely and intensely living in the imaginary. They are carrying, with difficulty, a suitcase full of wedding presents, and recount all that they have had to do in order to obtain them. When the case falls to the ground we perceive that it is empty.

Subsequently, we see the colonizers (odious and ridiculous as always), the colonized people whom they oppress, and also the brothel where Warda, the perfect prostitute, receives the latter in order to make them live in the imaginary. Against this order, Saïd, his wife, and his mother commence the fight at the individual level of theft and of conflict with the Policeman and the Judge. The whole world, including the village people, is set against them. The women refuse to allow the mother to take part in a particularly important funeral; they do not wish to have the mother of a thief among their number. The latter resorts to magic, so as to have the question at issue settled by the dead man himself. Then, in one of the most beautiful scenes of the play—which also constitutes a model in miniature of it—the dead man, who returns for a few moments from the beyond, rejects those who do not belong to any order. It is a model in miniature of the play, because Si Slimane is at the same time an inhabitant of the village, the first resister who was killed, and the voice of a dead man, thus incorporating the three orders that Saïd, Leila, and the mother oppose throughout the play.

Suddenly Kadidja, who embodies the soul of the village, and the countless children understand that Saïd and his mother were right, and that there is no possible arrangement that can be made with the dominant; only violence can change the order of things:

> ". . . Saïd, Leila, my Dear Ones! you too would tell each other, each evening, of the evil happenings of the day. You had understood that only this could offer us hope. Evil, wonderful Evil, which still remains when everything else has collapsed, wonderful Evil, you will help us. I beseech you, I implore you, standing here, upright. Come, Evil, and fertilize my people. Let them not be idle! . . ."[5]

However, neither Saïd, Leila, nor the mother wishes to have any part in this collective struggle. Such as it is, it still contains some kind of order that risks limiting their nonconformity. The struggle begins between the colonized and the colonizers. The brothel itself is integrated into this struggle and becomes an element of reality. Warda cedes pride of place to another prostitute, Malika, who is connected with the resistance; and the prostitutes become regular and respected inhabitants of the village who play their part in the fight. On the other side of the stage appears the army, which has already been defeated, and for which the struggle is now only a make-believe ritual; although precisely by virtue of this it has become valid.

Saïd and Leila become increasingly close to one another and turn toward a solitary life in common. The mother, taking part by chance in the struggle of the colonized people, kills a soldier, but makes it appear a simple accident. Finally, everyone—soldiers, rebels, the mother, and Kadidja—is reconciled in the Kingdom of the Dead.

On Earth, Ommou, the collective figure, replaces the mother and Kadidja. The victorious rebels establish the new order, which—save for the opposition dominated/dominant—resembles the old one in certain respects. The brothel loses all justification for its existence; Warda is killed by the village people, and is replaced by a new prostitute from the north, who has no links with the imaginary nor with the resistance.

In the village, the new rulers prepare to judge Saïd, who has abandoned and betrayed them. Ommou intervenes in order to tell them that their struggle was valid and that they did not need to follow Saïd; but that the struggle is justified only to the extent that it leads to an order that makes way for Saïd, nonconformity, and song, which could not exist without him. Identifying herself with the hopes of the village and the community, Ommou is ready to disappear if a worthwhile world can finally be realized. But the insurgents, who have become the new rulers, do not understand her words. They do not see why it is necessary to incorporate nonconformity and freedom. The most they offer, as victors, is to pardon the one who had abandoned them during the struggle. Ommou explains to them that it is a question not of pardon, but of vindicating the world that they have only just created. One of the insurgents fires and Saïd is killed. Ommou will have to live 100 years in order to await the arrival of a truly free and valid order.

In the Kingdom of the Dead, the mother (who has entered it because in fact—in spite of her tricks and denials—she had taken part in the resistance) is waiting for Saïd and Leila. They do not come—but Leila sends her veil to her. As for Saïd, who has always refused any compromise or inclusion in any order whatsoever, he passes directly into the void.

In the French *avant-garde* theatre, which (as we have just seen) has been a realistic theatre in the best sense of the word—a theatre concerned with the essential problems of the society in which it was born—*Les paravents* has been and still is the first important optimistic play affirming the strength of man and the possibility of his resisting invincibly all forms of constraint and oppression.

When I wrote my first study on the theatre of Genet, I concluded by asking myself whether *Les paravents* was an isolated success, or whether it represented the first symptom of a historical turning-point, and of the fact that the contesting forces in contemporary society had developed sufficiently to assert their demand for renewal and for freedom:

> Does the fact that an author has been able to write this play in our day indicate a mere accident; is it explained primarily by the intellectual development of Genet; or is it concerned with something far more important: the first symptom of a historical turning-point?

And I concluded with these observations:

> Is *Les paravents* an isolated and fortuitous phenomenon? Is it already the first swallow announcing the arrival of Spring? Does it represent a turning-point in the intellectual and social life of our times? Important as this question may be, it is certainly a premature one, and no-one could answer it at present.[6]

Six years later events have borne the reply aloft on their crest. Today we know—as Saïd informs his mother in the opening lines of the play, several years before history allowed us to become conscious of it—the stage that the evolution of Western society has reached following upon the Second Industrial Revolution: "Already the roseate flush of the heaven. In half an hour the sun will have risen. . . ."[7]

References

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2. WITOLD GOMBROWICZ, *Le mariage* (Paris 1965), p. 201.
3. JEAN GENET, *Le balcon* (Paris 1956), p. 203.
4. JEAN GENET, *Les nègres* (Paris 1958), p. 19.
5. JEAN GENET, *Les paravents* (Paris 1961), p. 130.
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7. GENET, *Les paravents*, p. 13.

CHAPTER 17

Anti-Romanticism and Reaction

David Daiches*

I

In a lecture delivered at the University of Virginia in 1933, T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) defined "the struggle of our time" as the struggle "to concentrate, not to dissipate; to renew our association with traditional wisdom; to re-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race; the struggle, in a word, against Liberalism."[1] Five years earlier Eliot had described his position as "classical in literature, royalist in politics, anglo-catholic in religion."[2] Anyone who locates the necessary struggle of the modern world as the struggle against Liberalism is clearly a man of the Right if that political term has any meaning at all. And when he associates his political anti-Liberalism with a particular religious and a particular critical stance we are justified in saying that we have here a right-wing critic of culture, and more specifically a right-wing man of letters. Eliot's version of the Classicism-royalism-Catholicism syndrome clearly owed much to the ideas of T. E. Hulme (1883–1917), the critic and philosopher whose essays in *The New Age* between 1913 and 1915 had earlier brought together Classicism in literature with anti-Liberalism in both religion and politics. Hulme set himself firmly against what came to be called in England the Whig interpretation of history, which was a somewhat genteel 19th-century version of the 18th-century Enlightenment applied to British history. In an article on the sculptor Jacob Epstein, Hulme wrote:

> I do think that there is a certain general state of mind which has lasted from the Renaissance till now, with what is, in reality, little variation. It is perhaps enough to say that, taking at first the form of the "humanities," it has in its degeneracy taken the form of a belief in "Progress" and the rest of it. It was also in its way a fairly consistent system, but it is probably at the moment breaking up. I feel,

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* Professor of English, University of Sussex.

> myself, a repugnance towards the *Weltanschauung* (as distinct from the technical part) of all Philosophy since the Renaissance. In comparison with what I can vaguely call the religious attitude, it seems to me to be trivial.[3]

Later in the same article Hulme asserted that it was "the business of every honest man to clean the world of these sloppy dregs of the Renaissance." What Hulme was against was Renaissance Humanism, with which he associated Romanticism: "Romanticism . . . confuses both human and divine things, by not clearly separating them. The main thing with which it can be reproached is that it blurs the clear outlines of human relations—whether in political thought or in the literary treatment of sex—by introducing in them the *Perfection* that properly belongs to the non-human."[4] The Romantic writer is reproached for ignoring man's finiteness and need for discipline: "In the classical attitude you never seem to swing along to the infinite nothing. If you say an extravagant thing which does exceed the limits inside which you know man to be fastened, yet there is always conveyed in some way at the end an impression of yourself standing outside it, and not quite believing it, or consciously putting it forward as a flourish."[5] He objected "even to the best of the romantics" because of their "sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other. The thing has got so bad now that a poem which is all dry and hard, a properly classical poem, would not be considered poetry at all."[6] The Romantic attitude Hulme traces to Rousseau, with whom he associates the view that "man is by nature wonderful, of unlimited powers, and if hitherto has not appeared so, it is because of external obstacles and fetters, which it should be the main business of social politics to remove."[7] Hulme's translation (1916)[8] of *Réflexions sur la violence* by Georges Sorel (1847–1922), the French anarcho-syndicalist who disbelieved in evolutionary progress and held that only violence could produce desirable change, showed the direction of his own political thought. Hulme defended what he called "Sorel's anti-democratic position" and maintained that "democratic romanticism" was on the way out and that this was a good thing. Democracy, Romanticism, and disbelief in Original Sin were all associated:

> What is at the root of the contrasted system of ideas you find in Sorel, the classical, pessimistic, or, as its opponents would have it, the reactionary ideology? This system springs from the exactly contrary conception of man; the conviction that man is by nature bad or limited, and can consequently only accomplish anything of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic, or political. In other words, it believes in Original Sin. We may define Romantics, then, as all who do not

> believe in the Fall of Man. It is this opposition which in reality lies at the root of most of the other divisions in social and political thought.[9]

Eliot explicitly accepted Hulme's formulation. In his essay "Second Thoughts on Humanism" he wrote: "I agree with what Hulme says, and I am afraid that many modern Humanists are explicitly or implicitly committed to the view which Hulme denounces; and that they are, in consequence, men of the Renaissance rather than men of our own time."[10] And if Eliot did not specifically share Hulme's admiration for Sorel, he did explicitly share his admiration for the French royalist-fascist writer Charles Maurras and for what Hulme called "the brilliant group of writers connected with L'Action Française." (Maurras was a belligerent right-wing Catholic, although he and his group fell under papal interdict in 1926: he had swung violently to the anti-Semitic Right at the time of the Dreyfus case, when he joined the Action Française.) Thus behind Eliot's proclamation of himself as "classical in literature, royalist in politics, anglo-catholic in religion" in 1928 lies the complex set of equations and antitheses that had been built up by Hulme. For Hulme there was Classicism (good) against Romanticism (bad), belief in Original Sin (good) against confidence in man (bad), absolutism, or royalism, or some kind of political authoritarianism (good) against democracy (bad), discipline (good) against self-expression (bad), the mediaeval view (good) against the Renaissance view (bad). The first elements in each of these antitheses were associated, as were the second elements. But there were further associations and oppositions. With the classical and the self-disciplined went a poetry of hard, dry, precise images, exactness of epithet, emphasis of technique over subject-matter. "Did the poet have an actually realized visual object before him in which he delighted? It doesn't matter if it were a lady's shoe or the starry heavens. . . . It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things."[11] This kind of poetry is "cheerful and sophisticated," as opposed to "whining" Romanticism. Yet in spite of his insistence on precision of image, Hulme was opposed to Naturalism in any of the arts; that was part of the inheritance of the Renaissance that he wanted to get rid of. He preferred the geometrical and the abstract to the naturalistic, because it required more discipline and was not a matter of mimetic self-indulgence. Thus to the previously listed sets of oppositions we can add: abstract or geometrical art (good) against naturalistic art (bad), hard, dry images (good) against emotional and soft images (bad), and—something he worked out as a piece of deliberate nose-thumbing at the Romantic use of Coleridge's famous distinction between imagination and fancy and glorification of the former—fancy (good) against imagination (bad).

There were few in England or elsewhere who accepted the complete balance-sheet as set out by Hulme, although Eliot came nearest to doing so. Hulme's emphasis on the hard, dry image in poetry and on achieving the "exact curve of the thing" helped to produce the Imagist movement, whose principles were formulated by Ezra Pound. Pound's later embracing of Italian Fascism involved some elements common to Hulme's right-wing stance, but it was more a repudiation of the vulgarities and the financial structure of capitalist democracy: Pound (like Eliot, but more violently and obsessively) saw the international Jew as a symbol of the corruption of the modern capitalist world; his private obsession was usury and its destructive power in civilization. There are some contradictions here that would be comic if they had not had such tragic implications on the political and military level. Hulme had been a pupil of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whom he greatly admired and from whom he learned a great deal. But Bergson, who was Jewish, had been attacked for his Jewishness by Maurras, whom both Hulme and Eliot admired. The complications of the French literary-political scene were extraordinary. Julien Benda, himself of Jewish origin, attacked Bergson in 1912 as an agent of Romanticism, and belligerent French Classicism at this time associated, as Hulme did, Romanticism with effete and sloppy democracy. But Hulme never introduced the anti-Semitic theme into his criticisms of Romanticism and democracy, as the French writers tended to do.

But Imagism was purely a poetic movement, and its principles were first formulated by F. S. Flint (who had been in contact with Hulme and Pound) in *Poetry* (Chicago) in March 1913. Flint distinguished three imagist principles: the first was "direct treatment of the 'thing'"; the second was "to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation"; and the third, regarding rhythm, was "to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." Pound supplemented Flint's statement with "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste." These included injunctions such as "Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something"; "Go in fear of abstractions"; "Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent." Imagism—which had other sources besides the principles of Hulme and Pound, including Chinese and Japanese poetry, especially the Japanese verse-forms *tanka* and *hokku*—left a permanent mark on English and American poetry and criticism, but in itself it had a short life (flourishing in England and the United States only between 1913 and 1917), because it provided a formula for only the short descriptive lyric or brief mood-piece. Eliot, who was himself influenced by the Imagists, brought into his poetry the influence also of French Symbolists and English Jacobean poets and dramatists in order to add to the precision of imagery and the free yet disciplined rhythms of the Imagists much more complexity both of reverberation of meaning and of total structure.

When Eliot found himself in agreement with Hulme, it was not with any shock of new discovery. Before he ever settled in London (in 1915) he had been influenced in his native America by the anti-Romanticism of Irving Babbitt, whose lectures he had attended at Harvard. Babbitt, who was professor of French at Harvard, was co-founder with Paul Elmer More of the critical movement known as the "New Humanism," which called for order and tradition in art and life and attacked Romanticism for its subjectivity and commitment to individual self-expression rather than ordered artefacts with an objective moral pattern. For Babbitt, as for Hulme, Rousseau was the arch-villain: his *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919) formulated at length the anti-romantic doctrine he had been preaching at Harvard for years. Although Babbitt was not involved with politics in a serious practical way, he did write one political book, *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), in which he invited Mussolini to protect Americans from the "degenerate breeds" (echoing Maurras' *métèques*) in their midst. There is a pattern of thought here—invoking order, discipline, classical restraint, against disorder, self-expression, democracy—that reminds one of Hulme. And Eliot had come to know and admire Babbitt's ideas before he came to England to be confronted with those of Hulme. In talking to his Virginian audience in 1933 Eliot echoed Babbitt's attack on undesirable immigrants into America in congratulating the Virginians on having been "less invaded by foreign races" than had New England and New York.

Where Eliot differed from Babbitt was on the question of religion. He was distressed at Babbitt's inability to take the religious view, and puzzled by his equation of Humanism with tradition and order (the side that religion was also on), whereas for Eliot Humanism was on the other side. "It is a little difficult to define Humanism in Babbitt's terms, for he is very apt to line it up in battle order *with* religion *against* humanitarianism and Naturalism; and what I am trying to do is to *contrast* it with religion."[12] (It is interesting that Eliot accepted that religion [good] is opposed to humanitarianism [bad]. For him, as for so many on the Right, religion was a matter of theology and dogma rather than sentiment. He quoted Hulme with strong approval on this point: "It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma."[13] Yet one of the many paradoxes about Eliot is that his best religious poetry—*Ash Wednesday* [1930] and the *Four Quartets* [1943]—is very much a poetry of deep personal feeling and exploration, not at all concerned with theological formulation or dogmatic pronouncement.) Eliot praises Babbitt for his upholding of tradition and continuity and his awareness "that the Christian tradition is an essential part of the history of our race," and then goes on to argue that in believing thus Babbitt was really committed to the religious position even though he did not himself realize this. "The religious habits of the race are still very strong, in all places, at all times, and for all people. There is no humanistic habit: humanism is, I think, merely the state of mind of a few persons in a few places at a few times."[14] (Yet another paradox: Eliot seems here to be arguing by head-counting, a procedure quite counter to the general run of his thought. If civilization were largely composed of ape-neck Sweeneys, it would not follow for Eliot that the ape-neck Sweeneys were right: quite the reverse. And in his play *The Cocktail Party* [1950] the implication is quite clear that the ultimate religious gesture—always, for Eliot, martyrdom—is for the tiny minority, whereas the rest can at best just try to be nicer to their wives or husbands and carry on to the best of their graceless ability.)

Eliot's agreement with Babbitt was, then, on the question of tradition and order. Eliot's ideal was a homogeneous Christian society where heretics and dissenters would be limited in numbers and recognized as such. "The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable."[15] He consistently opposed any view of the "inner light" and he attacked those writers who worked outside what he considered to be the mainstream of the European Christian tradition. "We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy . . . that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house. What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet."[16] Eliot took the same position with regard to D. H. Lawrence as he took on Blake. "I have already touched upon the deplorable religious upbringing which gave Lawrence his lust for intellectual independence: like most people who do not know what orthodoxy is, he hated it. The point is that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity."[17] It is significant that the subtitle of *After Strange Gods* (1934) is *A Primer of Modern Heresy.*

In his Virginia lectures Eliot expressed his sympathy with that group of American writers from the South who had published a manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, in 1930. This book was a symposium whose contributors (including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Donald Davidson) had earlier been concerned with *The Fugitive*, a bi-monthly literary magazine published at Nashville, Tennessee, from 1922 to 1925. The writers of *The Fugitive* were opposed equally to the industrial civilization of the North and "the highcaste Brahmins of the Old South." They were Southern Agrarians, opposing to capitalism a somewhat romanticized version of a "natural" agrarian economy in tune with both the geography and the history of the region. The view was anti-capitalist, anti-industrial, and intellectually aristocratic. It accepted in some degree the legend of the Old South as an aristocratic culture based on the classics; it believed in political and cultural regionalism for America; and above all it rejected the consumer society of mass production and ubiquitous advertising and the egalitarian democracy on which it appeared to base itself. In this respect it is related to movements in 19th-century England directed against the effects of the Industrial Revolution on English culture and society, and we are reminded sometimes of Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, the former of whom certainly influenced the thinking of the group (as did Plato and Jefferson, among others). Opposition to the effects of industrialism in England could take the form either of nostalgia for a pre-industrial society or of support for an evolutionary or revolutionary movement leading to some kind of Socialism: William Morris combined both. Eliot's admiration of the *Fugitive* group was based on a shared sense of outrage at what industrial civilization had done to the West (a feeling that was fashionable at Harvard when Eliot studied there in the early years of the century, and which was expressed in E. A. Robinson's poem "Miniver Cheevy" in 1910, the year Eliot graduated from Harvard). Again, Eliot shared with the *Fugitive* group a belief that the order and tradition he required in civilization were also necessary to art.*

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* There is a connection between the *Fugitive* group and the New Criticism in America, of a kind reminiscent of Hulme's association of Classicism, order, and tradition. For a charting of the relevant currents, see DAVID DAICHES, "The New Criticism," in R. E. SPILLER (ed.), *A Time of Harvest* (New York 1962), pp. 95 ff.

The only member of the *Fugitive* group whose actual literary productions can be seen as the direct reflection of their right-wing political beliefs is Donald Davidson, whose essays and poems could be considered (from one point of view) as a highly sophisticated prolongation of the American Civil War through cultural means, including the re-interpretation of Southern history and character and reasoned attacks on the economic centralization coming from the North. But neither Robert Penn Warren's complexly probing novels and early metaphysical and later narrative and dramatic poetry, nor Allen Tate's polished yet profoundly symbolic poetry, nor Ransom's ironical, sometimes quizzical, nearly always witty and adroitly articulated poems, can be related directly to their authors' stance as embattled Southern gentlemen. The carry-over from politics to literature is mostly seen in a respect for form and a sense of the past.

Respect for form and a sense of the past are associated also with Eliot's poetic work, but there is again a paradox. For Eliot's impact on the poetic scene of both Britain and America in the early 1920s was that of a violent revolutionary. Traditionalists were bewildered and angered. They saw *The Waste Land* (1922) as an affront to the public, with its incomprehensible sequences of scenes, inaccessible private references, and outrageously idiosyncratic allusions and quotations. Conversely, the poem soon became the Bible of the poetic *avant-garde* on both sides of the Atlantic. This combination of extreme conservatism on what might be called the general socio-cultural front with revolutionary experimentalism in literary technique is a not uncommon phenomenon in the 20th century. Eliot gave his own explanation of this in his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917). Tradition, he argued, involves the historical sense, and

> the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[18]

But Eliot also argued in the same essay that "the existing monuments of literature form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." Although the existing order is complete before the arrival of the new work, "for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new." He concludes:

> Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.[19]

In spite of the revolutionary features of Eliot's dealing with tradition, he sought historical precedent and encouragement for what he was doing to English poetry. His theory of "dissociation of sensibility," which he put forward in his essay on the metaphysical poets in 1921, maintained that the fusion of wit and passion found in the great 17th-century poets gave way in the 18th century to a separation between the two, to the detriment of English poetry. Something happened to the mind of England, Eliot argued, "between the time of Donne . . . and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thoughts as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility." It is the 16th- and 17th-century fusion of thought and feeling that Eliot wanted to bring back into English poetry in his own practice. This meant not only rehabilitating such discredited devices of poetic wit as the pun; it meant in general strengthening the tough, ratiocinative element in poetry in the closest association with the movement of feeling. At the same time, Eliot conceded,

> it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.[20]

The increased difficulty of modern poetry, on this view, will thus have two causes: the deliberate attempt to recapture the fusion between wit and sensibility found in the metaphysical poets, and the unique variety and complexity of modern civilization. That variety and complexity, incidently, would seem to represent a fault on Eliot's standards, if we are to accept the various definitions of culture and society he gives in his several pronouncements on these matters. Thus there is almost a punitive element in the difficulty of such a poem as *The Waste Land*: civilization being (alas) what it is, the poet of true sensibility *must* respond by writing in this way. At the same time the metaphysical elements (which must be distinguished from the elements deriving from the attempt to render the variety and complexity of modern civilization) represent a timeless aesthetic good. But it was not only, or indeed most significantly, the 17th-century metaphysical poets who influenced Eliot. The dark, astringent verse of the Jacobean dramatists, combining colloquial vigour with a baroque exhibitionism, was at least equally important. And he learned from the French Symbolists how an image could be absolutely precise in its physical reference (as the Imagists demanded) and infinitely suggestive in the echoing meanings set up by its relation to other images. Irony, too, he learned from the French: one can find in Eliot's poetry whole lines translated verbatim from Jules Laforgue. Laforgue, Gautier, Baudelaire, as well as Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, combined their influence with that of the English metaphysical poets and Jacobean dramatists.

That wit necessarily involves irony was never explicitly stated by Eliot, although much of his early poetry is both witty and ironical. It was 20 years after Eliot had written his essay on the metaphysical poets that Robert Penn Warren, in his essay "Pure and Impure Poetry," provided the fullest and most polished version of an anti-romantic theory of poetry that goes back to Hulme and Eliot. On this view, the Romantics are vulnerable for being, like Shelley, the naive heroes of their own poems and for not insuring themselves by irony against the parody demanded by naivety. "The saint proves his vision by stepping cheerfully into the fires. The poet, somewhat less spectacularly, proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony—to the drama of his structure—in the hope that the fires will refine it. In other words, the poet wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned, that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience. And irony is one such device of reference."[21] This is not just a question of imagery. It involves structure even more significantly. In a poem that has properly "earned itself" there must be continuing tension between formality and informality, the particular and the general, the concrete and the abstract, the beautiful and the ugly, between prosaisms and poeticisms, or between other pairs of opposites depending on the type and style of poem; the poem will never depend on stock responses and stock materials (that would simply be "a toboggan slide, or a fall through space"); the reader must be involved actively and creatively; and, above all, "the structure is a dramatic structure, a movement through action toward rest, through complication toward simplicity of effect."[22]

Behind this definition lie ideas of discipline and the difficulty of coming to terms through hard-earned order with an imperfect world, which belong to the world of right-wing politics. There is a pessimism here, too, or at least a repudiation of the easy optimism of the Enlightenment, of 19th-century theories of progress, and of the large utopian visions of social reformers and revolutionaries. We are reminded of the conservatism of Dr Johnson and of Joseph Conrad. Johnson had no illusions about the corruption of society or the evil potentialities of human nature: he clung devoutly to Christianity because without it all was darkness, there were no grounds for hope in the natural or human worlds by themselves; and he was conservative because the existing order was at least an order, and any disruption would be bound to cause confusion and suffering and could not change the essential nature of the situation. Conrad, although he abandoned Christianity, remained deeply conservative because—as *Nostromo* (1904) shows conclusively—his deep pessimism about human nature gave him no grounds for believing that social change would alter the essential facts of the case. The new elements in the situation as seen by Warren—in what is a classic statement of the modern (i.e. post-Victorian) view of poetry—are the suspicion of the "stock response," the anger at the corruption of language produced by advertising and by the appeal by the "mass media" to the lowest common denominator of a mass audience, and the suspicion of the vast spread of semi-literacy as a result of universal free education. This last is an aristocratic attitude, although it can be seen on both the Right and the Left: both Right and Left see it as evidence of the decline of bourgeois democratic society, and they differ only in what they propose to do about it. It is perhaps worth remembering that in the 20 years before Hitler came to power in Germany it was largely the satirists of the Left who undermined belief in bourgeois democracy by their sustained satire and thus made it easy for democracy to be discredited and for fascist dictatorship to take its place. This prompts the view that the overt political stance of a writer may be of less importance than the implicit critique of modern civilization that sends him either to the Right or to the Left for a solution. W. B. Yeats's attack on the Dublin middle classes, like James Joyce's bitter repudiation of bourgeois Dublin in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914–5), might have come from Karl Marx; but Yeats was far out on the Right, whereas Joyce was almost obsessively non-political.

II

We have looked at Eliot's poetic theory and tried to relate it in some degree to his attitude to tradition, culture, and society. But what was his actual poetic practice? The question is important not only in terms of literary criticism and evaluation but also historically, because a later generation of poets, many of whom did not share Eliot's political or social views or even violently opposed them, were nevertheless deeply influenced by his way of writing poetry. Eliot's poetry is in fact a watershed in both English and American literature. What were the qualities that made it so?

In his early dramatic monologues, notably "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady" (both 1911), Eliot presented a psychological landscape through the organization of images that were not connected in any directly expository or narrative sequence, but which were nevertheless related to a recognizable social and personal situation. That situation was itself symbolic rather than literal in that it reflected or suggested or illuminated (one can consider the poems in any of these ways) not merely the physical characteristics of a social scene or the mental and emotional characteristics of an individual, but some central dislocation in modern civilization. The lack of the expected transitions between images and scenes, the deliberately startling imagery ("When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table"), the oblique, almost parodic, allusions, often detectable only by the erudite, to other poets from Hesiod to Laforgue, the use of epigraphs from Dante or Marlowe or some much less well-known (and unidentified) writer, the fluid verse-paragraphs and variable line-lengths corresponding to the emotional movement of the poem, the combination of colloquial and formal rhythms and vocabulary—all this bewildered the traditionalists and excited the *avant-garde*. And these techniques were further developed in *The Waste Land*, a long poem stripped (at Ezra Pound's suggestion) not only of its narrative line but of all images, situations, and presentations that might interfere with the impact of the dramatic sequence of fragments of scenes and symbols intended to provide the "objective correlative" of the vision of spiritual dryness out of which the poem was born. With an almost kaleidoscopic arrangement of fragments, with implications developed through multiple contrasts and through analogies with literary works often referred to in a distorted quotation or half-concealed allusion, and a ground-plan based on anthropological works by Sir James Frazer and Jessie Weston and the latter's interpretation of the significance of the legend of the Holy Grail, with variations in mood and tone and rhythms from the viciously colloquial to a deliberately over-stuffed formality, Eliot presented his symbolic vision of spiritual dryness, the decay of a civilization. The dramatic force of the poem was evident to sympathetic readers even when (as in most cases) they were unable to see the significance of particular allusions, to identify particular quotations, or to follow the pattern of particular clusters of images or references. Soon a generation of explicators sprang up who identified the quotations and related them to an over-all pattern of meaning. But Eliot's impact on younger poets in the 1930s was more important than his provision of much grist to the academic mill.

One could hardly call *The Waste Land* a right-wing poem. Nor could Eliot's later poems of spiritual exploration and regeneration be so called, although their mood and tone derive from his acceptance of Anglo-Catholic Christianity in 1927. If Eliot chose to take the Hulme line and associate his Christianity with Classicism in literature and "royalism" in politics, that was his own affair. In fact, of course, the intensely idiosyncratic nature of Eliot's poetry, with its references to private reading and its drawing on private memories and associations, is very far from "classical": yet another paradox about Eliot lies in the fact that, for all the critical revolt against Romanticism with which he is associated and which his own criticism did so much to encourage, from one point of view his own poetry marks an extreme development of the Romantic movement. From *Ash Wednesday* on, we find in Eliot's poetry a penitential note, a note of quiet searching for spiritual peace, with considerable allusion to biblical, liturgical, and mystical literature and to Dante. There is a lyrical calm in some of these poems, as well as in the purely secular "Marina," that is markedly different from the ironic violence of some of his early work. In *Four Quartets,* first published together in 1943, Eliot explored essentially religious moods, brooding on the relation between time and eternity and the cultivation of that selfless passivity that can yield the moment of timeless revelation in the midst of time. Although still complexly allusive, these poems have nothing of the savagely ironic humour and the deliberately startling juxtaposition of the sordid and the romantic that we find in so much of his earlier work. The apparently wayward personal element in the imagery and allusions in that earlier poetry, so strikingly at odds—on the surface at least—with his classical ideal, now finds new expression in lyrical, personal, religious poetry of quiet reflection and spiritual questing.

Yet Eliot's right-wing stance can perhaps be seen in his ignoring the vast middle-ground of human experience. He really seems to have no use for anybody between ape-neck Sweeney and the saint and martyr (an attitude that comes out more strongly in his plays than in his poetry).

His contempt for the world has an aristocratic as well as a religious element. Some readers at least feel a limitation of sympathy; which seems positively wilful, in his work taken as a whole. That limitation is actually flaunted in his earlier essays. Attacking Middleton Murry's view of the importance of the "inner voice" as the ultimate moral sanction, Eliot once wrote with quite extraordinary snobbery: "The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust."[23] Eliot knew very well that those who travelled first-class to horse races at Ascot were as subject to vanity, fear, and lust as those who travelled third-class to football matches at Swansea; the fact that he chose to make a class issue out of a moral issue throws an interesting light on his mind at the time. Something of this occasionally comes into his early poetry: David Craig has remarked on the extraordinary lack of generosity and of imaginative sympathy shown in the conversation of the working-class women in *The Waste Land.*[24] Yet the waste land is shown to encompass all classes, and the section that ends with the offending lines opens with a powerfully damning picture of upper-class neurasthenia. The characteristic themes of his later poems transcend these issues, and although we find a dismissal of "the generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers, distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees, industrial lords and petty contractors," who "all go into the dark" (*East Coker*), this derives from a religious *contemptio mundi* rather than from an aristocratic disdain. It might be said that in his personal religious poetry Eliot found his true poetic voice, and that *The Waste Land*, critically and historically important though it is, is neither his most successful nor, if we consider his poetic character profoundly, his most characteristic work. No one would have been likely to diagnose the early Eliot as essentially a contemplative poet. But this is how he emerged in the end, when his weary scorn of contemporary secular civilization was transmuted into an almost mystical withdrawal expressing itself in a subtly modulated poetry of meditation.

III

Eliot subtitled his book *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) with the significant description *Essays on Style and Order*, and we have noticed the part played by the search for order in 20th-century anti-Romanticism from Babbitt and Hulme well into the second decade of the century. For the writer and artist Percy Wyndham Lewis (1884–1957) the duty of the artist was to impose conscious order on the flux of experience rather than to surrender to that flux. Wyndham Lewis made a frontal attack on what he considered to be the surrender of will to experience in modern literature in his *Time and Western Man* (1927): Bergson with his conception of time as *la durée*, Einstein with his theory of relativity, and Joyce with his use of the stream of consciousness, were on this view all prime villains. (There was a distinct element of anti-Semitism in Lewis's writing of this period: Bergson and Einstein were Jews, and the hero of Joyce's *Ulysses* was a Jew. He regarded the Jews as proponents of romantic flux and surrender to emotion. Indeed, in a later-suppressed phrase in his novel *Tarr* [1918] he called them "the most decayed specimens of the lowest race on earth.") In the early 1930s Lewis made no bones about his sympathy with Fascism; he wrote an admiring book on Hitler in 1931, which he later regretted. In his massive satirical novel *The Apes of God* (1930) he attacked the literary culture of the 1920s with savage glee—sometimes using a sledgehammer to crack nuts—and in his gallery of parodied literary characters of the time he occasionally gave his own views directly, either through author's comment or through the mouth of a character introduced for the purpose. He sneers, for example, at a character (meant to be Joyce) who slips "into the part of an agitator, at the service of all oppressed classes—women, miners, children, Jews, horses, servants, negroes, frogs, footballs, carpets during Spring-cleaning, Zoo-reptiles, canaries and so forth"[25] (this is a good example of his technique of comic exaggeration). Another character declaims ironically: "Was not the War fought . . . to make the World safe for Democracy, and free of disturbing 'Lions,' for evermore? It is the Paradise of the Apes of God, we are to understand!"[26] The lion was an important symbol for Lewis. In *The Lion and the Fox* (1926), "a study of the role of the hero in the plays of Shakespeare," he set the lion of genius against the little foxes that spoil the vines, the conscious individual against the unconscious, undifferentiated mass.

There is great comic gusto in Lewis's attacks on all the modern movements that emanated from Bloomsbury and Bohemia. And in *The Childermass* (1928) and its two sequels *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta* (both 1955) he produced visionary novels of strange power that are unlike anything else in 20th-century English fiction. *The Childermass* (which is also the name he gave to this trilogy of novels) is set in a waste land outside Heaven, where the "emigrant mass" of humanity awaits examination by the Bailiff. The hallucinatory atmosphere, the grotesquerie, the strength of the narrative, the ritualistic and symbolic overtones of meaning combine to give this novel sequence an extraordinary brilliance of effect. It is less easy to relate this work to Lewis's right-wing politics than it is in the case of novels such as *Tarr* and *The Apes of God*. In spite of some unpleasantly illiberal statements in the 1920s and the 1930s, Lewis was never obsessed by a political position. As the editor of his letters has put it: "Unlike Pound, Lewis felt impelled to change his position when he discovered it to be in conflict with his patriotic and humanitarian instincts."[27] In *The Jews—Are They Human?* (1939) and *The Hitler Cult and How It Will End* (1939) he reversed his earlier position on a number of crucial points.

A passion for order implies some belief in hierarchy and therefore in aristocracy (intellectual if not social): this can be found in various ways in almost all the right-wing writers discussed in this chapter. One of Lewis's objections to Joyce was Joyce's interest in the states of mind of ordinary people. Writing to A. J. A. Symons about Joyce in 1929, Lewis remarked: " . . . it is not the 'unpunctuated' picture of Ulysses that I had in mind when we discussed it the other evening—that is merely a device . . . for presenting the disordered spouting of the imbecile low-average mind—it has no other justification (and, I agree, it is a pity Joyce has adopted that gibbering as a vehicle for the expression of *everything*, as at present)."[28] There was a kind of bogus democracy in surrendering to the flux of consciousness of an ordinary man. But surrender to that flux was for Lewis bad anyway, as was surrender to the "dark forces" within, which he found in D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930). Lewis attacked Lawrence in *Paleface* (1929) for precisely this kind of romantic primitivism. No two contemporary writers could have been further apart than Lawrence and Lewis, yet at some points they came together.

Lawrence raged against the deadening effect of modern industrial democratic society, against the effect on human relations of middle-class convention and of a cerebral, diagrammatic approach to life that obscured or distorted the true centres of the self; in emphasizing the claims of instinct, the call of the blood, the domain of the solar plexus against the claims of abstract reason and convention, he at times appeared to be approving that "thinking with the blood" recommended by Hitler and his propagandists as justification for racialist myths and irrational prejudices and cruelties. And when, in such novels as *Aaron's Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), he also introduced the leadership theme, it looked as though the charge of Fascism could be proved against him. But, although we occasionally find some rather odd things in Lawrence, the charge is ludicrous. Lawrence was not a political character at all, and never really speculated on the political implications of his most deeply held views. And his greatness as a novelist does not lie in his persuasiveness as a prophet. Indeed, as a prophet he is often murky and sometimes confused. It is his ability to translate his own deeply sensitive awareness of kinds of human relationship—their frustrations and limitations as well as their possibilities—into scenes and situations rendered with immense local conviction combined with moving reverberation of human meaning that makes him a great novelist. *Sons and Lovers* (1913), based on his early life, renders the psychological development of a maritally frustrated mother's turning to her son with extraordinary delicacy of feeling and understanding, and at the same time with a sense of the class situation and its relation to history and topography that is equally perceptive.

His two most remarkable novels, *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), break new ground not only in their exploration of human (especially sexual) relationships by means of a detailed charting of feeling and response but also by finding ways of illuminating the human drama by relating it in the most detailed and intimate manner to physical environment and social atmosphere. The structure of these novels is their least effective aspect; Lawrence believed in what Levin Shücking once called, with respect to Shakespeare, "episodic intensification," and his novels remain in the mind as a series of brilliantly rendered scenes or moments with flat or over-rhetorical passages in between, rather than as perfectly shaped patterns of meaning. This might be said to be a romantic rather than a classical characteristic, and in one sense of the term Lawrence is certainly *the* romantic artist of 20th-century English literature. It is significant that Eliot called him a heretic and Wyndham Lewis considered him a primitivist. For Eliot, he was in the same category as Blake, which may be damning in terms of Eliot's categories of orthodoxy and heterodoxy but at the same time is no mean compliment. And although at a superficial level the supposed fascist implications of Lawrence's position may seem to bring him into the same camp as Lewis, the fundamental difference between them remains. Furthermore, although it is possible to deduce a right-wing creed from some of Lawrence's writings, there can be no doubt at all that fundamentally the set of his mind and emotions was towards the Left. He was a revolutionary (though an unpolitical one) at heart. It is true he could say: "You must drop all your democracy. You must not believe in 'the people.' One class is no better than another. It must be a case of Wisdom, or Truth. Let the working classes *be* working classes. That is the truth. There must be an aristocracy of people who have wisdom, and there must be a Ruler: a Kaiser: no Presidents and democracies."[29] But he could also say, to the same correspondent: "One must be an outlaw these days, not a teacher or preacher. One must retire out of the herd and then fire bombs into it."[30] His revolutionary primitivism emerges clearly when he urges Bertrand Russell to "stop working and writing altogether and become a creature instead of a mechanical instrument. Do clear out of the whole social ship. Do for your very pride's sake become a mere nothing, a mole, a creature that feels its way and doesn't think. Do for heaven's sake be a baby, and not a savant any more."[31] This is certainly not a right-wing position. In fact, these are not the utterances of a political man at all, and it is best not to try to put Lawrence into any political category.

The case is very different with Wyndham Lewis's friend, the poet Roy Campbell (1902–57), who in a Note to his book of poems written from among the Franco forces in Spain, *Flowering Rifle* (1939), echoed an already quoted remark of Lewis's in announcing that "humanitarianism sides automatically with the Dog against Man, the Jew against the Christian, the black against the white, the servant against the master, the criminal against the judge." Campbell was in revolt against the Bloomsbury of the 1920s and the left-wing poets of the 1930s. Born in South Africa, Campbell began as a satirist of what has been called the "sickly Tennysonian mush" on which he had been brought up. He employed the heroic couplet with vigour and wit, and in *Adamastor* (1930) showed his ability to handle a rich and resonant verse in a variety of stanza forms. *The Georgiad* (1931) is a satire in heroic couplets of the London literary establishment of the day, witty in its spiteful way, yet in the end monotonous in its insistent vituperation. In technical matters Campbell was a very traditional poet, whose sonorous language can be effective in spite of a certain emptiness at its core. His mind was the most purely fascist of any writer of quality in 20th-century England. His political attitude was not linked to any philosophical quest for order, although he himself seems to have associated it with his Catholic religion. He glorified violence, hated humanitarians, liberals, and Jews, and affected in his personal life as well as in some of his writing the stormtrooper's swagger. There was something adolescent about him to the end of his life, and for all his genuine poetic talent he seems in retrospect to have been a case of arrested development.

That W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) was politically a man of the Right can hardly be disputed. Yet, in spite of his clearly expressed approval of certain aspects of Fascism in the 1930s, one cannot easily associate him either with the Hulme syndrome of anti-Romanticism, order, and religion (for was it not Yeats who wrote "We Were the Last Romantics"?), with the right-wing anti-establishment satire of Wyndham Lewis, or with the vulgar fascist attitudinizing of Roy Campbell. The fact that his origins were Protestant Irish, and that he was an anti-bourgeois Irish nationalist whose political attitudes were bound up with the special problems of Irish history from the death of Parnell in 1891 and of his own relation to that history, helps to account for the complexities of the situation.[32] Yeats developed from a dreamy poet in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition to a taut and disciplined poet whose images brought together wit and magic, argument and symbol. In the process he virtually ran the gamut of the history of poetry in his lifetime, showing—but always in his own way—the repudiation of self-indulgent escapism in favour of epigram and irony, interest in schemes and systems of symbolism, preoccupation with stylization and artifice as well as with the counterpointing of the colloquial and the formal, and (this being something very much his own) concern with the heroic stance and gesture. From the beginning, even in his earliest dreamy poetry, he had shown a fondness for the high gesture of aristocratic affirmation,[33] which was given a new direction when Lady Gregory introduced him to Coole Park, her country house in Galway, where she read him Castiglione's *The Courtier*, and later went with him on a tour of northern Italy, where he was able to see the effects of patronage of the arts by the great dukes. Later still, when Yeats became involved in the controversy about Hugh Lane's gift of modern French pictures to Dublin on condition that the corporation should house them properly (which they declined to do), he was stirred to a frenzy of anti-bourgeois feeling directed against the money-grubbing philistinism of those who had been responsible for the virtual rejection of the pictures,

> Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
> Of our old Paudeen in his shop. . . .[34]

These Dublin shopkeepers (who were Catholics as well as philistine bourgeois, and as such doubly despised by Yeats, who saw himself as in the tradition of the landed Protestant ascendancy in Ireland), whose characteristic activity was to "fumble in a greasy till / And add the halfpence to the pence," were not the class to save Ireland:

> Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
> It's with O'Leary in the grave.[35]

The old Fenian John O'Leary was for long Yeats's model of the true Irish patriot, who planned for an ideal and distant nationalist revolution without compromise with any forces of the present:

> O'Leary had joined the Fenian movement with no hope of success, as we know, but because he believed such a movement good for the moral character of the people. . . . The worth of a man's acts in the moral memory, a continual height of mind in the doing of them, seemed more to him than their immediate result, if, indeed, the sight of many failures had not taken away the thought of success. A man was not to lie, or even to give up his dignity, on any patriotic plea, and I have heard him say, "I have but one religion, the old Persian: to bend the bow and tell the truth," and again, "There are things a man must not do to save a nation," and again, "A man must not cry in public to save a nation. . . ."[36]

Yeats tested the Dublin bourgeoisie against this ideal, and found them sadly wanting. Yet, after some had got themselves killed in the Easter Rebellion of 1916, he reversed his judgment:

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around a fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.[37]

But this was a temporary mood: Yeats remained anti-bourgeois (often associating his anti-bourgeois feeling with his Irish anti-British feeling, for the English were after all a nation of shopkeepers), though he could go below as well as above the bourgeoisie in looking for his ideal—to the simple Irish peasant or fisherman, the freckled man in "grey Connemara cloth," or even the fool or beggar, as well as to the courtier of the Renaissance.

Yeats's social and poetic ideals became associated: it is in his poem "The Fisherman," where he describes with approval this "wise and simple man" of the people, that he proclaims his ambition to write a "poem maybe as cold and passionate as the dawn." The coldness, an aesthetic ideal of finely chiselled artifice, is associated with ritual, gesture, gaiety in tragedy, the ideal stance of both the artist and the aristocrat:

> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death:
> Horseman, pass by![38]

The horseman is a knightly figure from the days of chivalry, and he symbolizes both strength and beauty, and at the same time objectivity. We see the idea presented at the more simply human level in the concluding stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter":

> And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
> Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
> For arrogance and hatred are the wares
> Peddled in the thoroughfares.
> How but in custom and in ceremony
> Are innocence and beauty born?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree.[39]

We must set Yeats's cruder political utterances, such as the overt approval of militarism and of some aspects at least of Hitlerism expressed in his pamphlet *On the Boiler* (1939), not only beside the aesthetic-*cum*-social ideal expressed in some of his finest poems but also in the context of his elaborate cyclical view of history and his conviction that the democracies had had their day and that something new and terrible, yet in the long run hopeful, was coming to take their place:

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[40]

The lines form the conclusion of "The Second Coming," an extraordinary poem in which his historical vision of the collapse of civilization and the terrifying shape of its renewal is given powerful and disturbing expression. But there is also the Yeats of "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium," which show the artist repudiating the natural world, trapped in time and change and decay, to seek the "artifice of eternity," the cold world of art outside time, like the "cold pastoral" of Keats's Grecian urn. But in the end Yeats returns to the natural and human world as the only source of art: in old age he seeks again "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." This return involves anger and prejudice and a revival of anti-British feeling. As the clouds of World War II gathered, Yeats could not help exulting in the thought of the defeat and collapse of Ireland's old enemy, England. Irish nationalism, and the particular kind of Irish nationalism developed by Yeats in response to his own needs and position and the movement of Irish history in his time, is always a powerful factor in defining Yeats's right-wing attitudes. There is an element of Romanticism, too, in Yeats's view of what was happening in Europe, which enabled him to see a movement such as Nazism, essentially bourgeois (even *petit-bourgeois*) in its mass support, as somehow related to his elevated visions of Great House life and the aristocratic dance. Yet there can be no doubt that some of the political utterances of this great poet are profoundly disturbing to most admirers of his poetry, not simply because they are on the side of the Right—many great men have been on that side—but because of the nasty nonsense with which he sometimes seemed to associate himself. An element of puzzle remains. That puzzle has been most luminously treated, if not fully solved, by Conor Cruise O'Brien. And we shall leave it to him to sum up the problem discussed in this chapter:

> A Marxist critique which starts from the assumption that bad politics make for bad style will continue "not to succeed." The opposite assumption, though not entirely true, would be nearer to the truth. The politics of the left—any left, even a popular "national movement"—impose, by their emphasis on collective effort and on sacrifice, a constraint on the artist, a constraint which may show itself in artificialities of style, vagueness or simple carelessness. Right-wing politics, with their emphasis on the freedom of the *elite*, impose less constraint, require less pretence, allow style to become more personal and direct.[41]

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CHAPTER 18

British Poetry and Its Audience, 1914–70

Angus Calder*

I

In 1962 the director of a leading publisher of new verse estimated that a sale of 300 copies was all that could be expected for a volume by a living poet who was good but not famous. This meant that the audience for a new poet was probably no bigger than it had been 300 years before, although the literate public was now 20 times larger.[1]

Two more encouraging developments modify this estimate. First, the presence of poetry on the school syllabus introduced new verse, through anthologies and "set books," to the vast audience provided by universal compulsory education. Second, by 1970 Penguin Books was making very considerable sales of paperback volumes not only of established poets, but also of unknown ones. It would seem that the second development is related to the first, and that the growth of education in the 20th century has hastened forward, from the mid-1930s on, the vast sales of "quality" paperbacks, of which poetry now takes a modest share.

Between the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 1922 and the poet's death in 1965, the number of students currently receiving university education had risen by over 150 per cent—from about 52,000 in 1922 to 132,000 in 1962.[2] At the latter date, Eliot's poems were familiar "set texts" in the Advanced Level examinations, and were required reading in departments of English Literature. When the much larger student body of the United States is added to the expanding student populations of the English-speaking Commonwealth, it is clear that a poet accorded "major" status may expect within his own lifetime to command through the world's educational systems a captive audience numbered in six figures—an audience, furthermore, that can be compelled to take pains with difficult and technically sophisticated material.

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* Counsellor and Tutor, The Open University.

In addition, many universities now provide sinecures for "writers in residence," of which many good poets have taken advantage. Universities and the boards that select set books for schools have become the new patrons for poetry, replacing the aristocrats of the Renaissance and the liberating but uncertain bourgeois public that supported Byron, Tennyson, and Kipling. But this is not, in most cases, to the satisfaction of aspiring poets. The audience provided by educational institutions cannot be characterized as exactly "bourgeois" or "philistine"; in theory at any rate it is socially sterilized by the antiseptic academic intellect. But it cannot satisfy a poet's lust for High Culture: how different is an assistant lecturer in Eng. Lit. living in a detached maisonette from the megalopsychic Renaissance patrons beloved of Yeats and Pound! Nor, alternatively, can it appease a craving for immediate socio-political impact, for a hand on the levers of class power: the proportion of university students of working-class origin has remained stable in the 20th century at around 25 per cent, and in any case universities are readily seen, not least by their own radical students, as handmaidens of the capitalist state. Nor can such a selective and coerced audience attract the poet who merely wishes to be widely loved and admired as a great entertainer, like Dickens or Shaw. The poet in search of psychologically succouring patronage in our contemporary mass society is perhaps lonelier and more frustrated than any poet has ever been before; even bohemianism no longer provides much of a sub-culture within bourgeois society, because so many budding bohemians will now turn into television producers, advertising copywriters, and assistant lecturers in Eng. Lit., integrated by their own university degrees into the plurality of social structures, of authorized cultures within the culture, that sustains the new mass democracy under monopoly-capitalist tutelage.

II

In a perceptive introduction to his anthology of the British poetry of the 1930s, Professor Skelton remarks of the leaders of the left-wing movement in verse at that time:

> . . . it seems as if these poets really did believe that a poet could be an effective modern prophet. They talked in an almost empty theatre as

> if it were a packed Wembley stadium. They argued, proved, disproved, and judged, as if the whole nation were listening. They had, in fact, discovered a drama and invented an audience. This, of all the thirties phenomena, is perhaps the most fascinating. These poems of social criticism were almost all aimed at people who did not exist, at least in the roles assumed by the poems. Their assurance and poise is a pretence. Their prophecies are made to a handful of the converted.[3]

No poem can be shaped without an audience in mind, and it is obvious that the character of the audience envisaged will condition the character of the poem. The elaborate wit of John Donne depends as fully on the known existence of a small but highly alert audience as the combination of confidential intimacy with passages of bitter political oratory in Byron's *Don Juan* depends on the poet's assurance of the existence of a wide and shock-worthy readership in the upper and middle classes. But the most significant audiences for poetry in Britain in the 20th century have been not actual but imaginary.

Pound's *Cantos* (1925–60) depend for their existence on the poet's assumption, not that a significant audience *does* exist that can pick up detailed allusions to the histories of China, Italy, and the United States, but that such an audience *should* exist. It is trite to point out that the ideal reader of *The Waste Land* must share not only Eliot's deep interest in past cultures, but also his sharply specific interests in certain particular cultures. Hugh MacDiarmid's use of a "synthetic Scots" amounts to the creation of an ideal language shared with a non-existent Scottish audience combining in its diction the glamour of the court tongue of the Scottish Renaissance with the vigour of the contemporary vernacular.

Pound's essay "The Serious Artist" (1913) includes a comparison between the poet and the mathematician:

> The serious artist is usually, or is often, as far from the *aegrum vulgus* as is the serious scientist. Nobody has heard of the abstract mathematicians who worked out the determinants that Marconi made use of in his computations for the wireless telegraph. The public, the public so dear to the journalistic heart, is far more concerned with the shareholders in the Marconi company.[4]

This thesis offers psychological balm to the modern poet concerned to justify his activities in the eyes of a gadget-crazy world that misunderstands, denounces, or ignores the experimentation without which the craft cannot be sustained or extended. Just as the *avant-garde* work of the experimental chemist may result eventually in cheap and attractive plastics, so the researches of the poet on "man, mankind, and the individual"—and on the resources of language itself—may eventually, if they are adopted and applied, help to transform the mental life of the majority. In this case the poet's ideal audience is a small circle of fellow men of letters (fellow-scientists) who can seize at once on the significance of his work.

MacDiarmid echoes the cadences of Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) when—in *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955)—he embraces a comparison between "difficult" modern poetry and the most "difficult" tendencies in modern music:

> Other masters may conceivably write
> Even yet in C Major
> But we—we take the perhaps "primrose path"
> To the dodecaphonic bonfire.[5]

This can be associated with MacDiarmid's statement of 30 years before that he was "immensely more interested in the vaguest adumbration of what might have been than in any possible development of what we are."[6] Although it is an important symptom of his actual involvement in modernity that MacDiarmid, like Pound, should elsewhere find a parallel for his activities in science, in practice the role claimed by both is the ancient one of the prophet without honour in his own country, the "unacknowledged legislator" of Shelley's famous phrase. Both would clearly be tempted to support Browning's remark in "Popularity":

> My poet holds the Future fast,
> Accepts the coming ages' duty,
> Their Present for this Past . . .[7]

and along with it Browning's suggestion in the same poem that a writer such as Keats, unpopular in his own lifetime, might nevertheless be enormously successful after his death.

But Browning's poem, like most of his work, had implied that model of unbroken gradual continuity, of inexorable progress, that the Victorians had made their own. Neither Pound nor MacDiarmid could accept that notion; each of them, Pound on the Right and MacDiarmid on the Left, has formed part of that rebellion against liberalism which Professor Daiches discusses elsewhere in this volume.* The political earthquakes of the 20th century, to which both responded with immense if misdirected vigour, have imposed from without an involvement of the "serious artist" with topicalities, mining the ivory towers and bombing the garrets. And at the same time they have weakened or removed the hope of rewards in old age or of glory after death. For Wilfred Owen fighting in World War I or for Keith Douglas in World War II, the possibility of immediate personal extinction was associated with great though imprecise fears for the future of the nation, of the culture, and of the human race; and after 1945 these rapidly crystallized in a widespread belief not in the possibility, but in the near-certainty, of the destruction of civilization in atomic war.

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* See Chapter 17, "Anti-Romanticism and Reaction."

If the poet wanted to be heard, he had better be heard now, and he had better have something helpful to communicate; this feeling surfaced in Owen's famous pronouncement of 1918, in the draft preface to the volume of poems that he did not live to complete:

> My subject is War, and the pity of War.
> The Poetry is in the pity.
>
> Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.[8]

If few statements have been more remorselessly quoted in the discussion of modern poetry, this is partly because none illustrates more clearly the rape of the poetic consciousness by mass politics in the 20th century.

Owen was there at the moment of maximum shock, in the trenches of World War I, and his utterance coincided with the wave of horror and despair that rises in Pound's *Mauberley*, in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and in Yeats's unforgettable vision in "The Second Coming" of the blood-dimmed tide and of a rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem to be born. But Owen was younger than these men, and intellectually unformed; his cry responded, as theirs did not, to the direct experience of horror; and his rapid growth to a sufficient maturity involved discarding wholesale his previous notions, borrowed from the 19th century, about what Poetry was and should be. "Tennyson, it seems, was always a great child," he wrote to his mother. "So should I have been, but for Beaumont Hamel."[9] In rejecting Tennyson he allotted to himself a novel role. On the one hand, poets must "warn," and this implied the *avant-garde* posture of a man more sensitive than his fellows, who could savour as they might not the omens for the future in the happenings of the present. On the other hand, if the Poetry was "in the pity," then this indicated the poet's duty to shock the present with a recognition of itself, and even an artist with as little curiosity about sociological questions as Owen seems to have had must have envisaged for his urgent accounts of the fighting in France the widest possible audience for poetry. Only by exciting mass reaction could he hope to assist in stopping the conditions against which he protested.

Certainly, this was the logic followed by the poets of the 1930s who chose Owen as a model. For Cecil Day Lewis, writing in 1934, the meaning of Owen's manifesto was that, in such times of crisis, poetry must harness itself to propaganda:

> . . . circumstances may force the poet unwillingly to take up the position of prophet—"all the poet can do to-day is to warn" [*sic*]. Again, when he says, "That is why the true Poets must be truthful," he is not suggesting that there are times when true Poets are allowed to tell lies. There is poetical truth, and there is common honesty; they are very distant relations: Owen's plea was that the crisis should bring them together, that the greater—poetical truth—should temporarily put itself under the command of the lesser. Owen commends himself to post-war poets largely because they feel themselves to be in the same predicament; they feel the same lack of a stable background against which the dance of words may stand out plainly, the same distrust and horror of the unnatural forms into which life for the majority of people is being forced.[10]

Day Lewis refers, of course, to the Depression and the mass unemployment of the period in which he wrote. Elsewhere in his essay he accepts Yeats's familiar statement that "We make out of the quarrel with others rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry," and insists that effective revolutionary poetry can derive only from deep personal feeling, that the poet cannot reduce himself to the mere instrument of a cause. But in looking forward to the emergence of a poetry in which "Communism is the foundation and the integral framework,"[11] he clarifies the implications of his remarks on Owen. "Poetry," in the old-fashioned definition that Day Lewis seems to half-accept, as Owen had still in effect accepted it fully when he had written that he was not "concerned with Poetry," must concede to the political imperative.

As Owen and many others growing up in the first decade of this century would have defined it, from their reading of the verse of the previous 100 years, the chief substance of Poetry was dreams, visions, lofty speculation, and indulgence of the senses. The reader of it would be very willing to comply with William Morris's invitation to "Forget six countries overhung with smoke,"[12] and speed with him on a voyage to the mythical past, although he would accept as valid also such inspirational rhetoric as that of Morris's socialist songs.

Although the "hardness" of Pound's images and the cheeky topical character of his squibs at the expense of bourgeois London, the concentration on contemporary squalor in Eliot's early poetry, and the boxing match with reality that Yeats undertook in middle age, have all been potent in diverting poets and their readers from the old notions, Owen's status as a representative of the change is still, perhaps, pre-eminent. His continuing symbolic importance is reflected in Ted Hughes's poem of the 1950s, "Wilfred Owen's Photographs." It is in character with Owen's own poetic that this poem *presents*, rather than defines or conceptualizes, what seems to be Hughes's consciousness of a role shared with the earlier poet. The title alludes to the collection of front-line pictures that Owen had been assembling with a view to shocking the British public. But the poem itself describes an incident in the House of Commons in the late 19th century when one of Parnell's Irish members confronted those opposed to a motion that the cat-o'-nine-tails should be abolished in the navy with a real example of the instrument in question:

> . . . A witty profound Irishman calls
> For a "cat" into the House, and sits to watch
> The gentry fingering its stained tails.
>
> Whereupon . . .
>   quietly, unopposed,
> The motion was passed.[13]

This poem seems apt to explain the intention of Hughes's early work, in which the violence of birds and animals is presented, almost enacted, with little explicit moral comment; if we can confront the violence of nature in which we share, this may help us to transcend it. The influence of Owen and his fellow "war poets," Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, was important in helping to establish, for descriptive prose as well as for poetry, the idea that art not only *could* but *must* confront horror and squalor, that the documentation of the extreme experience is not only allowable but desirable; and it is reflected as much in the "confessional" verse of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath as in "committed" poetry.

It is arguable that Owen's witness against war has in fact to an important degree influenced the young of several generations to regard fighting as horrible rather than glorious; his appeal was perhaps as immediate to the anti-Vietnam protesters (and poetasters) of the 1960s as it had been to Day Lewis's generation. Equally plausible is Francis Scarfe's claim, made as early as 1942, that the leftist poets of the 1930s had made history:

> This adolescent, precocious literature mightily stirred the youth of the thirties, and turned many young men towards the left who might easily have become fascists had that influence been lacking.[14]

But it would seem safer to argue that the conditions that stimulated the poetry of Owen and Auden also produced a receptive climate for their verse, and that these poets confirmed, rather than initiated, certain trends of attitude within the poetry-reading classes. They were influential precisely in so far as they were representative; which, as we see in the perspectives of 20th-century history, was not very far.

Further, the poetic implied in "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" must confront an elementary question: don't documentary films or trips to the slaughterhouse acquaint an audience with violence more vividly than verse can? It is not that opportunities for influence are obviously available for the "committed" poet; it is rather that poets under stress of war, genocide, and rumours of war, have felt compelled to write as if such opportunities existed.

The one point on which every poet in every culture has always been clear is that he or she wants to write poetry rather than pamphlets, leading articles, treatises on the habits of predators, or theses in political sociology. All explanations and manifestos come after this initial commitment to the form itself, and in general such utterances are blatantly or subtly inconsistent with the actual practice of the poet who makes them. But it is significant that poets should feel compelled to produce such statements, to justify themselves. "When I find myself in the company of scientists," W. H. Auden has written, "I feel like a shabby curate who has strayed by mistake into a drawing room full of dukes."[15] Although every poet is conscious of the glories of a tradition stretching from Homer and peopled by men of universally admitted greatness, the prestige of contemporary poetry is low, and its audience is small. What is perhaps more depressing is that its audience, which in theory might be a literate population of 50 million, is in fact small, ingrown, and specialized. Novelists can sell their wares in W. H. Smith's or Boot's, but the poet's shop is a small one, in the back streets; he has been left behind by the advance of mass society, and his voice is inaudible above the hubbub of the supermarket as Hemingway's, or Graham Greene's, is not.

The creation, implicit or explicit, of an imaginary audience may be a gesture of hope—as in the 1930s, when the intention was to reach a wider public by pretending that it existed; or it may be a confession of despair with all actually possible roles, a retreat from the contemporary scene. A poem by Hugh MacDiarmid, "Glasgow 1960," indicates in light-hearted phantasy what many of his contemporaries have dreamt of:

> Returning to Glasgow after long exile
> Nothing seemed to me to have changed its style.

Buses and trams all labelled "To Ibrox"
Swung past packed tight as they'd hold with folks.
Football match, I concluded, but just to make sure
I asked; and the man looked at me fell dour,
Then said, "Where in God's name are *you* frae, sir?
It'll be a record gate, but the cause o' the stir
Is a debate on 'la loi de l'effort converti'
Between Professor MacFadyen and a Spainish pairty."
I gasped. The newsboys came running along,
"Special! Turkish Poet's Abstruse New Song.
Scottish Authors' Opinions"—and, holy snakes,
I saw the edition sell like hot cakes.[16]

III

In the 20th century the consolidation of mass culture and the crisis of liberal individualism have conspired together to determine the character of poetry.

Long before the beginning of the century, poetry had irretrievably lost its audiences of the Renaissance: its place in the culture of a court that had liked to think itself graceful, and its popular audience in the theatre. It had lost also the somewhat marginal but quite respectable role that it had played in the consolidated mercantilist culture of bourgeoisie and gentry in the 18th century. It had gained, with the success of Scott and Byron and the slower acceptance of the other great Romantics, a footing in the embryonic mass market as industrialism had swollen the towns, and Tennyson flourished as a wealthy, prestigious, and prolific national bard in the realm of Queen Victoria.

But bourgeois Romanticism spins with self-contradictions. Browning was a cardinal influence on Pound, and Gerard Manley Hopkins has affected most poetry written since 1918, when his work was first published (29 years after his death), and thus their cases are of special relevance. The work of both involves an extreme individualism reinforced, of course, by the influence of the first wave of Romantics. Hopkins, in his uneven but seminal output, was able to express in terms of tragedy the conflict in Victorian culture between the claims of rampant and rapacious individualism and the aspirations that another strain in Romanticism had associated with tradition, community, craftsmanship, and nature: a conflict embodied in the filthy industrial city with its neo-Gothic churches. Browning evaded the issues. To glory as he did in the individualism of the Italian Renaissance was to evade the crisis brought about by individualism in England; his bluff colloquial tone suggests a confrontation with reality that does not in fact occur. But whereas Hopkins had no audience in his lifetime beyond the few friends to whom he showed his manuscripts, and could barely reconcile in himself the competing claims of poetry, with its Romantic individualism, and priesthood, with its necessary self-effacement, Browning died a successful and beloved Great Victorian. He held an audience by pretending to stir and puzzle it, but in fact reassuring it at precisely the points where it most needed reassurance: the existence of God, and His demonstrable sympathy for Adam Smith and Cobden.

It was against bourgeois ideals of Poetry as dream and reassurance that Owen revolted in the trenches. Pound, of course, had been moving against the bourgeoisie for some years before that, and so had Yeats. It is worth citing John Holloway's valuable analysis of the tactics and strategy of the major campaigns led by Yeats, Pound, and Eliot that cleared out a territory for modern poetry. They involve, as he points out, a repudiation of "the whole Tennysonian stance." To

> . . . the demand that social respectability should not be allowed to impose restrictions of subject matter upon the poet nor literary convention impose restrictions of diction or emotion . . .

the new poetic allied

> . . . an insistence on the supreme virtue of economy and concentration: poetry was not to be made easy for the relaxed general reader. . . .

And this involved, together with the disruption of the reader's notions of "normal discourse," the introduction of

> . . . perhaps the most characteristic quality of all, a constant laconic *juxtaposition* of ideas, rather than an ordering of them in an easy-to-follow exposition.[17]

But to shock the bourgeoisie was also to shock its enemies. The aristocracy had long since ceased to pay attention to poets, and the taste of the Labour Movement in poetry (where it existed at all) was sturdily Shelleyan and Tennysonian. The elitism that Yeats, Eliot, and Pound shared, and which was a prominent streak in MacDiarmid's personality, involved a supposition that good poetry at the present time could communicate with a numerous audience only by some not wholly willed or fortunate accident. Pound's disgust with the existing public emerges strongly from his *Mauberley* sequences, especially in the rather crude assault there upon "Mr Nixon," a representative of those writers, such as H. G. Wells and

Arnold Bennett, who had come to terms with popular taste and had prospered. His bouncy manner in "Commission," published a few years earlier, had indeed invoked a wide audience, but an atomized one:

> Go, my songs, to the lonely and the unsatisfied,
> Go also to the nerve-wracked, go to the enslaved-by-convention,
> Bear to them my contempt for their oppressors.
> Go as a great wave of cool water,
> Bear my contempt of oppressors. . . .

But surely it was, precisely, the "enslaved-by-convention" who would go to the greatest pains to ensure that Mr Pound's aquatic offerings would not splash their dresses. As the catalogue proceeds, it becomes clear that this is a bardic equivalent of masturbation phantasy; the songs are to go, prithee, to "the bourgeoise who is dying of her ennuis . . . to the women in suburbs . . . to those who have delicate lust," and, most generally of all, "to those who are thickened by middle age."[18]

Yeats, in "The Fisherman," written at about the same time, is more sober and essentially more honest. In the scalding tones of his middle period, he denounces "the reality" of his own times:

> The witty man and his joke
> Aimed at the commonest ear,
> The clever man who cries
> The catch-cries of the clown,
> The beating down of the wise
> And great Art beaten down. . . .

In his onslaught on the Catholic bourgeoisie of Dublin, Yeats includes with special contempt the intellectuals and politicians who pander to the mob. "In scorn of this audience," he turns to the "wise and simple" fisherman of his dreams:

> . . . I began . . .
> Imagining a man
> And his sun-freckled face,
> And grey Connemara cloth,
> Climbing up to a place
> Where stone is dark under froth,
> And the down-turn of his wrist
> When the flies drop in the stream;
> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream;
> And cried, "Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem maybe as cold
> And passionate as the dawn."[19]

In selecting a person of indeterminate class, yet firmly positioned in traditional country life and preoccupied with an outdoor pursuit involving skill ("the down-turn of his wrist") but not book-learning, Yeats is disowning the town and with it the educated. His own audience, as he well knew, consisted chiefly of urbanized intellectuals; and no other class was likely to have much patience with the extremely difficult poetry he was soon to produce; but to admit that he wrote for such people would be to deny his own stand against the present.

At exactly the time when these two great innovators were turning their backs on, or shaking their fists at, the existing public, Edward Marsh's anthologies of Georgian poetry were establishing the existence of a surprisingly wide interest in a school of verse that for most tastes was "modern" enough. John Masefield (1878–1967), the prophet of this school, seemed vigorous and contemporary indeed after the wistful aestheticism of the 1890s, in which Yeats had shared but against which he had now reacted; and in "Wagner" and "A Channel Passage," Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) produced models for a poetry of disenchantment dwelling on the minor squalors of contemporary existence. The second is worth quoting:

> The damned ship lurched and slithered. Quiet and quick
>   My cold gorge rose; the long sea rolled; I knew
> I must think hard of something, or be sick;
>   And could think hard of only one thing—*you*!
> You, you alone could hold my fancy ever!
>   And with you memories come, sharp pain, and dole.
> Now there's a choice—heart-ache or tortured liver!
>   A sea-sick body, or a you-sick soul!
>
> Do I forget you? Retchings twist and tie me,
>   Old meat, good meals, brown gobbets, up I throw.
> Do I remember? Acrid return and slimy,
>   The sobs and slobber of a last year's woe.
> And still the sick ship rolls. 'Tis hard, I tell ye,
>   To choose 'twixt love and nausea, heart and belly.[20]

Choosing the sonnet form and handling it in a generally orthodox manner, Brooke is trying to revive the colloquial strength of such Renaissance poems as Michael Drayton's "Since There's No Help, Come Let Us Kiss and Part" (1619). Certain phrases ("my fancy ever," "last year's woe") belong to the stock of "Poetry," and "tortured liver" and "brown gobbets" involve the deliberate application of absurdly "Poetic" vocabulary to the mundane process of vomiting. The poem is a calculated *tour de force*, and if it succeeds at all, which is doubtful, it succeeds on that level only.

But it points forward as saliently as the better poems of Owen, with whom Brooke is now always compared so unfavourably. Indeed, its manner has much in common with that in which Owen, and more especially Siegfried Sassoon, expressed their indignation at the war, mocking not only the established values of bourgeois nationalism that could be held responsible for the slaughter, but also, by inflation and by parody, the established Tennysonian Poetry that had supported those values. It may seem to readers of any future century that the stock of English verse in the first two thirds of the 20th century is accurately prefigured in "A Channel Passage." Whether it is a lesser figure of the 1930s trying to write about unemployment, or a don of the 1950s commenting on his own sexual inadequacy, the attempt to wrest significance from everyday and unheroic experience by "Poetic" turns of phrase and compression of style, and the simultaneous mockery of that very attempt, are standard. (See, for instance, Donald Davie's "Rejoinder to a Critic," quoted below.) The poet banishes, or jeers at, his bardship and his godhead and stresses his own physical and mental ordinariness. This provides him with protective camouflage in a contemporary society that regards poets as odd, but allows him, as in Brooke's "A Channel Passage" or Philip Larkin's "Church Going," to smuggle in a little old-fashioned Poetry on the sly.

This is one clue to the character of Georgian verse: though freeing itself from the hypnotic trance of the 1890s, it was Poetic enough to commend itself to the enslaved-by-convention who read Wells and Bennett and who attended Bernard Shaw's plays partly for the pleasure of being "shocked" in a way they could cope with. *Georgian Poetry*, the name chosen by Marsh for his anthologies (five volumes, 1912-22), was another clue. It was at once an affirmation of contemporaneity (King George V had just succeeded King Edward VII) and a harking back to days of yore. A third clue may be found in John Drinkwater's poem "A Town Window," published in the second anthology:

> Beyond my window in the night
> Is but a drab inglorious street,
> Yet there the frost and clean starlight
> As over Warwick woods are sweet.[21]

It was profoundly reassuring for a town readership to be told that the English countryside still flourished, even in the Midlands around the

Birmingham conurbation, that acme, or acne, of ugliness and philistine spirit. Although it is certainly unfair to suggest that the Georgians were concerned only with tinkers, fairies, and the wind on the downs, the note of nostalgia for a vanished rusticity that recurs in their work links them to that notable line of English idyllists—Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, T. H. White, and latterly Tolkien—who for several decades have fed the suburban imagination with a mystique of Olde England, titillating the owners of week-end cottages with a feeling for the countryside that emphasizes the mythical, warlike, or squirearchical past and ignores the leaking thatch and tractors of the present.

The first anthology of *Georgian Poetry* (1912) sold 15,000 copies; the second (1915) sold 19,000.[22] The increase may partly have reflected the increased interest in poetry during the war, when the dead Brooke became a martyr-hero, his patriotic sonnet "The Soldier" became excellent sedative propaganda, and much worse poets than Brooke sold books of patriotic twaddle by tens of thousands. In any case, the success of Marsh's anthologies should not be measured in their immediate sales figures. Imitated and pillaged, they provided the substance of standard school anthologies for many years to come, and formed the taste of at least two generations of children.[23] John Betjeman's *Collected Poems* became a best-seller in the 1960s, perhaps because Betjeman offered an up-dated Georgianism, brooding over Victorian churches rather than rustic verities, but tapping an equally available vein of nostalgia in a style no more prickly or "modern" than Rupert Brooke's.

In fact, popular taste for verse between 1920 and 1970 seems to have changed barely at all. The Romantics, within 50 years, had succeeded in impressing their innovations upon the public, but the Moderns achieved no similar feat. Indeed, they had hardly won over the body of practising serious poets. School anthologies of the 1960s, breaking away from Georgianism, could draw on the work of respected and serious writers such as Andrew Young, R. S. Thomas, Edwin Muir, and Robert Graves, who derived little or nothing from the heroes of Modernism; even a Ted Hughes or a Jon Silkin seems to owe much more to Lawrence (a "Georgian" by Marsh's selection, it must be remembered) than to Pound or Eliot. Those possessed by the idea that a poem should be about a country scene, or an animal, or a character, or a romantic love affair, and that it should tackle its subject explicitly and directly, could find ample anthology pieces to suit them in the work of such thoroughly competent poets, who were in no sense "old-fashioned." It was the plain and watery style of Eliot's plays, not the dense indirectness of his major poetry, that appealed to a wide middle-class audience in the 1940s and 1950s, and that, in association with the shallow prettiness of Christopher Fry's verse comedies, led to talk of a revival of poetic drama.

Betjeman and Fry (with his recipe of Shaw-and-sugar) certainly took their place, though not a commanding one, near the mainstream of that 20th-century British mass culture in which bourgeois culture had submerged itself. Its current was determined by the gradual diffusion of prosperity through the lower middle class to at least the upper reaches of the working class; by the arrival of universal compulsory education, which after 1944 became compulsory secondary education; and by the expansion of light industries, housing estates, and suburban development into the countryside, along with changes in the character of that countryside caused by rural depopulation and mechanized farming.

The spiritual centre of the "new" England was located by more than one important writer somewhere around Slough, a small town to the west of London inflated by the light-engineering boom of the inter-war period. It was here that George Orwell in 1940 identified a new kind of life being lived at different class levels "in labour-saving flats or Council houses, along the concrete roads and in the naked democracy of the swimming-pools . . . a rather restless, cultureless life centring around tinned food, *Picture Post*, the radio and the internal combustion engine."[24] The new life style ignored religion and enthroned technology. It gave a dominant place to the film-star and the super-salesman; it succumbed gratefully to American styles and habits when these revealed themselves. It reflected the increasing homogenization of Britain, where the "Oxford" accent, relayed over the radio, invaded all parts of the provinces and where the distinctive forms of working-class leisure activity were either superseded by the mass media (as was the music hall) or accepted into the life style of the new middle class (as was soccer).

Against Slough, John Betjeman in the 1930s directed a poem that does justice to his real, if minor, talent:

> Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
> It isn't fit for humans now,
> There isn't grass to graze a cow
> Swarm over, Death!
>
> Come, bombs, and blow to smithereens
> Those air-conditioned, bright canteens,
> Tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk, tinned beans
> Tinned minds, tinned breath. . . .
>
> But spare the bald young clerks who add
> The profits of the stinking cad;

It's not their fault that they are mad,
They've tasted Hell.

It's not their fault they do not know
The birdsong from the radio,
It's not their fault they often go
To Maidenhead.

And talk of sports and makes of cars
In various bogus Tudor bars
And daren't look up and see the stars
But belch instead. . . .[25]

The appeal from poet to reader is based partly on the deep horror of nature defiled that has sustained so much poetry since Wordsworth, but more significantly on a contempt for the bogus, the chromium-plated, and the *nouveau riche* that belongs to those who like to consider themselves old-rich. We hear the voice of the old middle class, of the gentry and the professions, deploring the new tribes of "stinking cads," jumped-up vulgarians, sales managers, garage proprietors, and cinema owners. Only to those accustomed to eating in leathery comfort could the notion of an "air-conditioned, bright canteen" seem disgusting, and it takes a very special snobbery to respond to Betjeman's contempt for the town of Maidenhead.

However, the opening mock-heroic call to the bombers cannot be taken seriously, and because the verse-form adopted, with its deliberate collapse into bathos in the short fourth line of each stanza, is suitable only for light effects, the poem belongs to a minor mode of satire quite close to the Victorian burlesque of W. S. Gilbert, one of the heroes of the new culture. It is easy to see why the sons and daughters of the bald young clerks of Slough and their equivalents elsewhere figured among the thousands who bought Betjeman's verse in the 1960s and the millions who enjoyed his self-mockingly sentimental television programmes; such affectionate assaults on mediocrity tease the targets, but offend no one.

"Slough" certainly demands a less serious response than Pound's probings in *Mauberley:*

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace. . . .

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time,
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the "sculpture" of rhyme. . . .

All things are a flowing
Sage Heraclitus says;
But a tawdry cheapness
Shall outlast our days. . . .

All men, in law, are equals.
Free of Pisistratus,
We choose a knave or an eunuch
To rule over us. . . .[26]

But the dissatisfaction expressed in these famous passages had had a very similar basis to Betjeman's. Hustle and tawdriness are seen to characterize the new life style, and are inimical to art; so is the democracy that gives the bald young clerks licence to get what they want; not "light," but sickly sweetness. Eliot, reviewing the third volume of *Georgian Poetry* (1917), concentrated attack not on its nastiness but on its pleasantness; and in *The Waste Land* he reserved a passage of intense, though subtle, snobbishness for the seduction of a typist by a "small house agent's clerk,"

One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.[27]

It is the mechanical (that is, modern) quality of this sexual encounter that is emphasized. The couple involved, like the *nouveau-riche* Bradford millionaire who had made a mushroom fortune out of the demand for woollen uniforms in World War I—the first mechanized war—are products of the machine age, along with Pound's "kinema." Whatever might please such people must be wrong and bad.

The cinema, in fact, was early identified as a special threat to poetry. The very notion of imagism to which Pound subscribed, and the juxtaposing of ideas—analogous to cinematic "cutting"—that replaced familiar modes of articulation in *The Waste Land* as in *Mauberley*, can be seen as a remarkably rapid response to the new language of the image revealed on the screen. (So can Owen's collection of photographs, and the way in which his poetic anticipates the direction in which realist cinema has travelled.) But the territory of poetry, even more than that of fiction, was invaded and largely usurped by the production for the mass market not only of mediocre films but also of work of high artistic quality. What verse narrative could match in vividness, or indeed in "poetic" quality, such a film epic as John Ford's *Iron Horse* (1924), such a terse and immediate statement as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)? What mode of love poetry could register certain elusive shades of emotion more efficiently than a camera directed by Jean Renoir or Ingmar Bergman, or could deploy symbolism more delicately around them? The radio, however, proved to be an excellent medium for verse drama and for poetry readings. That sign of the times, *Picture Post*, carried a photo-feature in 1946 that identified no fewer than nine poets, including William Empson, Roy Campbell, Louis MacNeice, and Dylan Thomas, who had found an affable patron as employees of the BBC.[28] But the rise of television in the 1950s, when it effectively captured radio's mass audience, extended the artistic or quasi-artistic power of the photographic image deep into the majority of homes, in Hampstead and Oxford as well as in Slough; pictures tussled with words, distracting attention from any careful choice of language.

In any case, the BBC had from the first regarded poetry as a subject appealing only to a minority—an attitude that found concrete expression with the launching of the Third Programme immediately after World War II. There would, the BBC decreed, be a Light Programme for the lowbrow, a Home Service for the middle-brow, and a Third Programme for an audience of highbrows measured in thousands (as compared with millions who listened to the others). In one way, the mere existence of the Third Programme was a remarkable tribute to the achievements of education; but its ghetto-like character emphasized the limitations of that achievement. Although for the first time a numerous nation-wide cultural elite existed, and could be attracted into dialogue with the artist with remarkable directness and simultaneity, the relative insignificance of this elite in numerical terms amounted to an endorsement of Pound's woe-crying.

This brings us back to the nature of the actual audience achieved by the masters of Modernism and their more serious successors. In total it might seem not too depressing; volumes by established poets such as Graves or Auden sold well, if only because they were required by most self-respecting public libraries. But, as we have seen, the hopes for fame, influence, and prosperity that a contemporary poet may realistically nurture depend on the response of those appointed to decide what gets taught in schools, and his hopes of sensitive and thorough reading by adults must rest largely with teachers of literature in universities.

The rise of the "Eng. Lit." audience for poetry has been accompanied by the rise of the New Criticism (itself associated in its origins with those of Modernism among creative writers). In place of the appreciative gush or the rambling intellectual speculation that had served the old poetry for critical correction, the New Critics have given detailed and astringent analysis to very recent verse. By 1953, Stephen Spender was complaining that:

> Such criticism assumes that writing is an intellectual process of making a work which can then be analysed back to its elements by an intellectual process. . . . A process of increasing self-conscious purposiveness in writing gradually leads to the situation where the analytic critic is almost dictating his themes to the self-conscious poet.[29]

A little later Robert Graves was reporting with cheerful horror that he had met a girl studying English at Cambridge who, when he asked her what poems she liked most, "answered with dignity: 'Poems are not meant to be enjoyed; they are meant to be analysed.'"[30]

In the early 1960s a similar assault by Philip Larkin introduced by implication an interesting imaginary audience, very different from Pound's or Yeats's:

> Poetry has lost its old audience and gained a new one. This has been caused by the consequences of a cunning merger between poet, literary critic and academic critic (three classes now notoriously indistinguishable): it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the poet has gained the happy position wherein he can praise his own poetry in the press and explain it in the class-room, and the reader has been bullied into giving up the consumer's power to say *I don't like this, bring me something different*. . . . The cash customers of poetry, therefore, who used to put down their money in the sure and certain hope of enjoyment as if at a theatre or concert hall, were quick to move elsewhere. . . . They have been replaced by a humbler squad, whose aim is not pleasure but self-improvement, and who have uncritically accepted the contention that they cannot appreciate poetry without preliminary investment in the intellectual equipment which, by the merest chance, their tutor happens to have about him. . . . But at bottom poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute. . . .[31]

Mr Larkin himself is a university librarian. His reputation has been much more heavily supported than that of any of his contemporaries (he was born in 1922) by the very academic critics of whom he complains. But he seems to establish here as his ideal audience an average sensual man, uncontaminated by intellectualism, who might be prepared to pay cash for verse as if for steaks or tomatoes. The image is less exalted than Yeats's, and involves the acceptance of those modern principles, hedonism and commercialism, that the masters of "Modernism" rejected. But it bears no more relation to practicalities than the Connemara fisherman.

Larkin's remarks are quoted in Robert Conquest's introduction to his second *New Lines* anthology (1963), in which the first of Larkin's own contributions is "For Sidney Bechet":

> That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes
> Like New Orleans reflected on the water,
> And in all ears appropriate falsehood wakes,
>
> Building for some a legendary Quarter
> Of balconies, flower-baskets and quadrilles,
> Everyone making love and going shares—
> Oh, play that thing! . . .[32]

To enjoy the poem without difficulty, the reader must share Larkin's own "minority" taste for "classical" jazz and must be aware of Sidney Bechet as a Creole clarinettist and saxophonist. Larkin usually makes do without recondite allusions, but his style, with its subtle and far from easy syntax, is hardly adjusted to the mass market he would seem to yearn for.

What does conform interestingly to his prose statement is the subject of the poem. Larkin's admittedly sensuous and escapist pleasure in the emotional vigour of Bechet's playing, itself designed for a cash-customer audience, scatters, as he puts it, his "long-haired," highbrow "grief." It would be unfair to suggest that the whole substance of Larkin's dextrous work is to be found in his dissatisfaction with the emotional and social limitations of the academic life he leads; but that very central strain in it may be detected in his prose remarks, as in this poem. Just as Pound's command that his songs should go to the lonely is in effect a way of saying "I am lonely," just as Yeats's fisherman represents the poet's longing for a simpler way of life in fact impossible for Yeats himself, so Larkin's cash customer seems to derive from his own notion (not uncommon, but surely fallacious) that the poor and lowbrow enjoy themselves more than the rich and highbrow.

The contemporary poet yearns for the "unified" culture of the Greeks and of Shakespeare's England—essentially for the post of bard in the tribe, the most gratifying yet assigned. (Both Yeats and Robert Graves, playing occult mysteries at the centre of their poetic, have come close to implying a role for the poet as witch-doctor; and only a theoretical devotion to the notion of direct contact with an audience can explain the enthusiasm shown by some good poets for public readings, at which a poem of any subtlety can hardly be understood.) But the achievement of a unified culture would demand a limitation of that individual freedom which the poet, since the Romantics, has insisted upon for himself. Eliot, with his distinctive intellectual coolness, was able to accept this, and the view of the poet's role to be inferred from his famous essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" discounts both subjectivity and individuality: "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[33]

But Yeats was radical in his self-contradictions in this matter. The profundity of his internal divisions is plumbed in "Among Schoolchildren." This poem ends with perhaps the most celebrated of all images for the unified society, for man harmonized with his fellows and with nature:

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?[34]

But what is too seldom remarked is that the poem ends with a question mark. In the course of it Yeats has brooded over his favourite representative of the magnificence of the wayward human individual, Maud Gonne. If we see, for a moment, Maud Gonne as the dancer, then the possibility that she might be submerged in a dance, no more than part of a unified pattern, is not one that Yeats can accept easily. His Fascism can be seen as a too-easy leap out of inconsistency, taken but then retracted.

The *Führer*-principle in Fascism offers at the same time the possibilities of individual outstandingness and of communal unity. The warrior king, furthermore, will need his bard; the united tribe will need its spokesman and singer. Pound, whose inconsistencies are very like Yeats's, seems to have discerned in Mussolini a potential Medici. The political attachments of other poets can also be traced, at least in part, to an effort to reconcile the individual and the communal. Commitment to Communism, though satisfying humanitarian cravings associated (after the manner of the Romantics) with the poet's self-aggrandisement—the poet as Messiah is not hard to find, even in the 20th century—was much harder than Fascism to square with heroic individualism; hence, perhaps, the spell that Major Douglas's Social Credit movement cast over Pound (in his pro-human moments), his friend William Carlos Williams, and Hugh MacDiarmid. It was a notion that gave every man a modicum of personal property and independence, while harmonizing his interests with those of all. (However, MacDiarmid, as if to demonstrate his determination to remain in a minority of one, managed in the 1930s to be simultaneously a communist internationalist, a Scottish nationalist, and a supporter of Social Credit.)

The case of the so-called "Thirties Poets" (irrevocably so-called, though all were still writing in the 1960s) is also very much to the point, and permits us to gather together the beginnings of the academic audience, the crisis of individualism, and some implications of the imaginary audience. Yeats had hoped "to write for my own race," but reduced himself to addressing a fictional fisherman; now the Thirties Poets, in fact addressing each other, claimed to address the whole society. They spoke for Communism as individuals and for individualism (and the Leader) under the banner of Communism.

IV

Of 77 poets born after 1885 and included in Kenneth Allott's revised edition (1962) of his standard *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse*, two thirds (51) had certainly attended one of the ancient English universities, Oxford or Cambridge, and about half seem to have received their secondary education at public schools or similar exclusive institutions. Only 12 had finished their studies at "redbrick" universities.

That four fifths of the poets chosen had acquired university education was not really remarkable in an age of broadening educational opportunity, if one assumes that a good poet has abnormal intellectual gifts, but the dominance of Oxbridge is somewhat disconcerting. However, an analysis of the 14 contributors to the second volume of *Georgian Poetry* (1915) indicates that in the early years of the present century such a combination of academic respectability with poetic achievement could not be taken for granted. Only three—Rupert Brooke, James Elroy Flecker, and Harold Monro—had taken the upper-middle-class high road from public school to Oxbridge, though Lascelles Abercrombie's progress from public school to Manchester University had begun from the same point.

As Professor Stead has insisted in his invaluable study of *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot*, to regard Georgianism as reactionary is to miss the point: it was, indeed, "a revolt against the established poetry of the time," which ran parallel at first to Pound's and Eliot's. The popular Poetry of the first two decades of the century—and it was authentically "popular"—was the patriotic, imperialist verse of Kipling, Newbolt, Sir William Watson, and Alfred Noyes. A collection of his own verse republished by Newbolt early in the war almost immediately sold 70,000 copies. "'The Vigil' is being quoted, sung, recited and reprinted from one end of the country to the other," he records in a 1914 letter, "and I have letters of thanks in every post." It was a period when the ludicrous effusions of Alfred Austin were generally admired:

> Domain, Throne, Altar still may be upheld,
> So we disdain, as we disdained of yore,
> The foreign froth that foams against our shore,
> Only by its white cliffs to be repelled!

As against such writers, who saw poetry (or rather Poetry) as a mere vehicle for the expression of conservative public spirit, the Georgians stood out as innovators, liberals, and intellectuals—not for them the identification of the "public school spirit" as the supreme flowering of human nature, or of English nature, that characterizes Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada.*[35]

But the Georgians were mostly self-made intellectuals. In *Georgian Poetry*, where he appeared in company with W. H. Davies (erstwhile tramp and pedlar), Walter De La Mare (formerly clerk to an oil company), John Drinkwater (employed in an insurance office), James Stephens (a slum-bred clerk), and John Masefield (a sailor and knocker-about-the-world), D. H. Lawrence, the miner's son who went to Nottingham University, was by no means egregious. The Georgians, who touched for decades the taste of the ordinary Englishman, were not as a group educationally more fortunate than the average member of the expanding middle class.

It is against the background which their success provided that we can explain the way in which reviewers in the 1930s seized on the fact that the leaders of the new school had all been to Oxford. At three stages in the 20th century—the second decade, the fifth, and the seventh—a non-academic and non-establishment style of verse asserted itself and became popular. Two insurrections have provoked their backlash: perhaps we must expect the third. The critical victory achieved by the Thirties Poets over Georgianism was, oddly enough, a triumph for the Establishment over the Lower Orders.

F. R. Leavis, in 1950, skirmished heavily against the relationship between the critical success of Auden and the cultural hegemony of Oxbridge:

> The Auden who conquered the literary world with such ease was the undergraduate intellectual. . . . He cannot have noticed any essential differences when he passed from undergraduate Oxford into the world where the canon of contemporary literature is established, and the currency of accepted valuations stamped. The Oxford valuation became immediately metropolitan. . . . Auden was accepted as, beyond question, a leading intellectual and a major poet.[36]

But it would have been magnanimous of Leavis to point out that his own journal, *Scrutiny*, published in Cambridge from 1932 onward, had admitted Auden as an early contributor to its critical pages, presumably because he was regarded as a "leading intellectual." The respect that Leavis's anti-establishment critical school enjoyed at provincial universities and among schoolteachers may have had more to do than he would care to admit with the fact that Leavis himself, as a Cambridge don, operated from one of the universities where, it was mistakenly assumed, all the good ideas originated.

No precedent existed for the assault of MacSpaunday—the collective name given in jibe to W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis, and Stephen Spender. Not only did all four come from similar backgrounds—birth into the professional classes between 1904 and 1909, public school, and Oxford—but the impresarios and anthologists of the new movement that they led were Michael Roberts (public school and Cambridge), John Lehmann (Eton and Cambridge), and Geoffrey Grigson (public school and Oxford). Nor could this surprising coincidence of new poetic talent with establishment education be disregarded as adventitious. From the first, it was easy to see that the content of the new poetry referred heavily to that very education—not merely because casual references to "Wystan," "Stephen," and "Rex" drew the reader's attention to friendships between the poets forged in college rooms, but also because the manner of expression, and even the values expressed, clearly derived very often from a peculiarly intense relationship between poet and school.

"The best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state," wrote Auden in 1934.[37] But this did not prevent him from dedicating one of his "Six Odes" in *The Orators* (1932) to the captain of a public school rugby fifteen, another to "Edward Upward, Schoolmaster," and a third "To My Pupils" (like Day Lewis, he had taught in a fee-paying school). So it was not monstrously unfair of Edmund Wilson, in an essay of 1937 called, notably, "The Oxford Boys Becalmed," to accuse Auden of being "arrested at the mentality of an adolescent schoolboy. . . . The seizure of power he dreams of is an insurrection in the schoolroom."[38]

There is no need to expand on a point so long established. As Professor Skelton has argued, the public school fixation of the Thirties movement not only expressed itself in the schoolmasterly tone of certain characteristic poems, in the imagery of frontiers, spies, and manoeuvres recalling the Boy Scouts and the Officer Training Corps, and in snook-cocking abuse of the authorities suggestive of fourth-formers lampooning their masters; it seemed to be founded on a schoolboy-like code of honour in which a poet's loyalty to the group was regarded as crucially important (hence the exaggerated sense of shock when Auden "deserted" to America not long before the outbreak of World War II). The public school ethos was as central to Thirties poetry as it had been to that of Newbolt and Kipling, although it was yoked to left-wing political ideas.[39]

It is ungraceful to summarize so much rich and fascinating evidence in the dry proposition that what happened was the revolt of sensitive junior members of the ruling elite, in terms and tone drawn from the life style of that elite, against senior members who had failed to provide them with the sense of security that they needed. (Like many sociological observations, it is impudently reductive of the charms and complexities of human nature and of literary achievement.) But something like this will have to do. The Thirties Poets, experimenting with old ideas in a familiar way, were harbingers of the ultimately successful adjustment of the British ruling class to the demands of the catastrophic situation created by World War I and the slump of 1929. They stand with reforming Tories such as R. A. Butler and Quintin Hogg, and with establishment socialists such as R. H. S. Crossman and Douglas Jay,[40] rather than with Pablo Neruda, Aimé Césaire, and Bertolt Brecht; with the *avant-garde* of consensus and compromise rather than with the revolutionary liberators.

Day Lewis was a member of the Communist Party for three years; Spender very briefly; Auden and MacNeice never. But a commitment to Communism was advertised in the verse of the first three from very early in the 1930s. Auden, the most intellectual of the group, mixed in liberal spoonfuls of Freudian psychology and a few hot Lawrentian peppers of sexual freedom. Spender has attributed his own conversion to "the simple operation of a sense of guilt" at the "spectacle of working-class unemployment."[41] But a sense of guilt is never "simple." Middle-class unemployment, affecting young graduates and their friends, was another feature of the depression; and the menace of a new world war hung over the young in particular, because they would be the ones to fight in it. The appeal of Owen is easy to understand. Perhaps most important of all was the manner in which the Russian Revolution, and nearer home the British General Strike of 1926, had confronted the elite with the potential of working-class power. The omens for capitalism were bad, and it would be very foolish to support the losing side.

F. R. Leavis, in an extremely perceptive review article in *Scrutiny* (1933), arched his eyebrows over a recent "Song" by Auden—"a curious psychological document":

I'll get a job in a factory
I'll live with working boys
I'll play them at darts in the public house
I'll share their sorrows and joys
Not live in a world that has had its day.

They won't tell you their secrets
Though you pay for their drinks at the bar
They'll tell you lies for your money
For they know you for what you are
That you live in a world that has had its day.[42]

It is perhaps easier now to detect Auden's characteristic detached (and defensive) irony. But the sense that their own leisured world had been superseded was certainly stronger in the "Oxford Boys" than any clear commitment to a new proletarian world about to be born. (By contrast, MacDiarmid's splendid poem "The Seamless Garment," published not long before, and addressed to the poet's mill-worker cousin, confirms implicitly, by its achievement of an unaffected colloquialism, the commitments to Communism *and* to poetry that are explicitly registered.)[43]

For MacSpaunday, Communism was one way out of a collapsing house. But as Cleanth Brooks suggested from America before the decade was over, Auden's obsession with leaders, authority, and conspiracy indicated that Fascism was a real alternative:

> Of the many passages in Auden which deal with the devoted band of conspirators . . . some seem to be parodies, ironical and sometimes pitying, of fascism; and others seem to be fantasies which contain hints of what the proper sort of fascism (revolutionary communism?) ought to be. The constantly suggested connection between the school gang and the fascist conspirators is really intricate and important. The poet is allowed to imply: fascism is juvenile—ought to appeal really to schoolboys. And yet he is also allowed to imply: these peoples have their validity—there is sloth and complacency which are to be combatted.[44]

But what differentiated Auden's group from (let us say) the Cavalier poets of the revolutionary period of the 17th century was their capacity not only to understand this kind of criticism, but also to agree with it. It was as if Spender was a Lovelace able to analyse the absurdity of his own idealism; MacNeice a Suckling prepared to trace his own cynicism to the collapse of values among the ruling elite; and Auden a Marvell not only able to command the icily detached, ironic ambiguity of a Horatian ode but cheerfully prepared to discuss the hints of the poet's own arrested sexual development to be found in "The Garden." Followers of Marx and Freud, they studied themselves as products of their own environment.

Hence, in a most interesting way, their sense of the individual's actual domination by history and society cut across two contradictory urges, corresponding to Yeats's in "Among Schoolchildren." One was to justify themselves as individuals and to preserve the individual integrity of the poet as Romanticism and liberalism demanded; the other was to escape from the agonies of individualism into community and wholeness. It was precisely at the location of Yeats's question mark that the Thirties Poets hovered.

The desire for self-obliteration—reinforced, of course, by Eliot's anti-Romanticism: *The Waste Land* had been read by the Thirties Poets as a soberly truthful analysis of modern Europe—produced demands for "objectivity" in poetry. Auden actually managed effects to which the word could be applied, in that coldly achieved poem "Spain," for instance. As Francis Scarfe put it, "Even his love poems seem to be about other people."[45] Geoffrey Grigson, one of the most influential editors of the decade, said starkly in 1939: "I judge every poem written now, *by poets under forty*, by the degree to which it takes notice, for ends not purely individual, of the universe of objects and events."[46] (The qualification I have italicized is richly symptomatic of the historical determinism then so fashionable.) For Auden, the poet must not try to escape from the world, though his "loneliness" was still viable:

> The only justified retreat is a loneliness from which everything and everybody is more visible, the loneliness in the centre and not on the edge. Unless a poet can be there sometimes at least, he has no claim to exist and no claim to be tolerated and need expect no good man to listen to him.[47]

But although Auden was able, with his habitual ease of synthesis, to reconcile in this way the dancer as individual and the dance as community, MacNeice—perhaps more honest—had more trouble. He denounced the "modern poet" who

> is often both a "rebel" against and a parasite upon his community. He makes it his pride to have different values and beliefs from those of the community, while at the same time he demands that the community shall support him and his poetry for their own sake. . . .

He proceeded from this to prescribe an imaginary audience:

> . . . the poet should imagine as his audience an ideal normal man who is an educated member of his own community and is basically at one with the poet in his attitude to life. . . .

And he went further to make his celebrated suggestion that the poet should be

> able-bodied, fond of talking, a reader of the newspapers, capable of pity and laughter, informed in economics, appreciative of women, involved in personal relationships, actively interested in politics, susceptible to physical impressions.[48]

Such a psychological surrender to the norms of current human nature meant submerging (though MacNeice, of course, didn't submerge) into a pretty mediocre dance. Day Lewis, pitching his balletic ambitions rather higher, entered the Communist Party (its Cheltenham branch) in a mood of "religious" exaltation, later recognizing that the gesture had appealed "to that part of me which from time to time revolted against the intolerable burden of selfhood and desired the anonymity of a unit in a crowd."[49] Within three years his artistic conscience, as he saw it, forced him to resign from the party.

The common quest of the Thirties Poets was for centrality, topicality, and immediate effect; their close awareness of each other helped to produce something like a common style. Their poetry was didactic, inspirational, and relatively straightforward in its presentation of ideas; and all these characteristics, it is worth noting, were a departure from the teachings of Eliot and Pound and a return in principle toward Newbolt and the Victorians. It twirled a kaleidoscope of images of contemporary life, among which private obsessions, favourite philosophical doctrines, and newly coined myths found their place.

Sales were in fact good, though not spectacular (Spender earned £500 from his first three books). But the 3500 copies that Auden's first volume sold in seven years may well have been bought by readers of his own class background and education, and certainly did not represent an impact on the public at large as great as that of Brooke and his fellow Georgians, let alone that of Kipling.[50] The remarks of Frank Swinnerton, a conventional but open-minded man of letters of the Georgian generation, may help to suggest why this was so. Such poetry seemed to him

> to be altogether too literary in everything except its language. It is self-conscious in a bad sense, as well as in a not so bad sense. It is also arrogant in tone, and I am inclined to think pretentious in object. . . . It expresses only the thoughts of an approved small circle of modern

> minds, so small and so exclusive, that this circle tends to crystallise itself into a new arbitrary mandarinate.[51]

Didacticism, in fact, was allied to a tone implying self-conscious self-appointment to prophetic status: not the prophetic tone of a Whitman, assumed as of right, but an uneasy and uncertain one. Did the poet really *mean* what he said? In Auden's "A Communist to Others," the voice of political commitment was manifestly the voice of a persona, not the poet's own; but even allowing for that, would a Communist really talk so very much like an Oxford graduate at home with 19th-century verse-forms? What was one to make of this dry address to the workers?

> We cannot put on airs with you
> The fears that hurt you hurt us too
>   Only we say
> That like all nightmares these are fake
> If you would help us we could make
> Our eyes to open, and awake
>   Shall find night day.[52]

Priest? Schoolmaster? Favourite uncle? Somebody was certainly "putting on airs." Could Auden be mocking his persona? Or were the airs his own? (In his post-war poetry, Auden developed a wholly convincing personal tone, that of the wide-ranging, good-humoured intellectual. He later disowned many of his political pieces of the 1930s; but they were central to his reputation at the time.)

Did Day Lewis really expect to win the favour of that large audience he claimed to address in "The Magnetic Mountain"?

> You who like peace, good sorts, happy in a small way
> Watching birds or playing cricket with schoolboys,
> Who pay for drinks all round, whom disaster chose not;
> Yet passing derelict mills and barns roof-rent
> Where despair has burnt itself out—hearts at a standstill,
> Who suffer loss, aware of lowered vitality;
> We can tell you a secret, offer a tonic; only
> Submit to the visiting angel, the strange new healer.[53]

Is this (one might wonder at first sight) an attempt to sell magic hair-oil to the bald young clerks of Slough? The random reader would not, of course, have known that "watching birds" and "playing cricket with schoolboys" were, around that time, favourite pastimes of the poet himself. But from the fact that no rational man would seriously ask his fellows to submit their own judgment to that of an enigmatic "we" in that tone of condescension marked by the phrase "good sorts," he might have guessed that the poem was in effect part of a dialogue between the poet and the poet, destined to be overheard by a few friends and sympathizers, but couched, as a kind of literary game, as an exercise in mass oratory. That the same writer should offer an imitation of Gerard Manley Hopkins, beginning "Yes, why do we all, seeing a Red, feel small,"[54] would seem further proof that for this poet the fascination of literary composition exceeded that of a sober engagement with practicalities.

V

Dylan Thomas (1914–53), emerging very young in 1933, was soon regarded as the leader of a counter-tendency to the Thirties school. Associated with him in leadership were George Barker and Henry Treece; none of them had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge. The nature of the counter-tendency is partly captured by a comparison between a familiar quotation from Auden's "Spain" and a section of the sonnet "O Hero Akimbo" by Barker that immediately followed it in the anti-fascist anthology *Poems for Spain* (1939):

On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;
On that table-land scored by rivers,
Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our fever. . . .

O hero akimbo on the mountains of to-morrow,
Star crossed spreadeagled and browbeaten Spain—
I see your starved shape grow more strong from pain,
Leap finer and freer from the grave of sorrow.
I see you gallivanting on the hills again—
O hero akimbo on the mountains of tomorrow.[55]

Although the *distance* from Spain is much the same in both cases (Auden had prospected the Spanish Civil War as a non-combatant; Barker had not been there), Barker's verse, which illustrates several of his vices, is much more obviously committed emotionally to the cause in question. Whereas Auden, correctly as events proved, hedged his bets, Barker predicted ultimate victory, though in terms so broad that "to-morrow" might mean 1989 or 2039. To the general reader, Barker might seem vague, but hardly evasive; intensely subjective, but not furtive; loud, but not pedantic or bossy.

The "neo-Romantic" style that forged ahead to dominate British verse in the 1940s, after Auden's departure for America, has currently a very low critical reputation, and much silliness that was written at the time about the liberated unconscious may certainly be found associated with it. Nevertheless, Dylan Thomas was a major writer; and the 1940s produced, in Keith Douglas (who was killed in Normandy in 1944 at the age of 24), a better-integrated poet than any of the Auden school. Douglas was master of a wholly controlled and plausible conversational tone that was fit to tackle major subjects, and could rise, as in "Simplify Me When I'm Dead," to a heartening splendour of diction not far from the best of Thomas. Without "detaching" or "committing" himself, and without moralizing, Douglas achieved the objectivity and centrality that MacSpaunday had thought desirable.

World War II made the question of political commitment, at least against Fascism, almost irrelevant, because virtually everyone in Britain was now committed to a struggle that seemed likely to have a revolutionary outcome. Partly because of a general shortage of new reading matter, new poetry—even by new authors—sold very well. John Lehmann's periodical *Penguin New Writing* sold out issues of 100,000, which were still insufficient to meet popular demand. One airman poet, John Pudney, matched this figure with a single slim volume, and sales of 10,000 for other books were not unusual.[56] Remembering Brooke and Owen, the public wanted combatant war poets, and acclaimed Pudney (who survived) and Sidney Keyes and Alun Lewis (who were killed) in terms that certainly flattered them. In an atmosphere of national dedication to higher values than material comfort, poetry was eminently respectable. Hordes of young aspirants pressed forward into print, in great part naively neo-Romantic, though the social commitment of the 1930s hung over in a great deal of drab, dry, unemphatic reporting.

In this brief outburst of popular interest, the dominant voice of Oxbridge was submerged. Indeed, there were such choruses from Wales and Scotland that England itself might have seemed in danger of going under. Verse, for a while, was democratized and decentralized. A sympathetic American observer, Kenneth Rexroth, while chiding the "rhetorical imprecision and verbal lassitude" of the neo-Romantics who overflowed his 1948 anthology of *The British Poets*, identified a significance in Dylan Thomas that British commentators have generally missed:

> Thomas's impact was not just literary, it was in a special sense social, a cultural coup d'état. Nothing less like a Marxist from a good School being raffish at a country house could be imagined. After Thomas, literature was wide open to others than the sons of gentlemen, if they could find some way to keep alive. And it is surprising how many of the

> significant younger poets in Britain today did not go to a Public School or to "either" university.[57]

There are obvious elements of exaggeration here—the earlier impact of D. H. Lawrence is notably ignored—but the statement deserves attention. Thomas was not strictly speaking working-class (his father taught English in a grammar school), but he came from Wales, where community still tended to transcend class, and had chosen not to go to university. He was ready to claim that "Nowhere . . . in all my writing, do I use any knowledge which is not commonplace to any literate person,"[58] and this was true.

Thomas's poetry does not communicate its intellectual content easily to those who wish to define it. But its appeal to the reader's sense of rhythm and sound, especially when read aloud by Thomas himself, is grand and immediate. It is chiefly concerned with birth, copulation, and death—those elemental subjects for which T. S. Eliot had felt so much distaste—and its appeal can never be restricted by its subject-matter, which is of general and enduring interest. What his most hostile critics may have subconsciously found hardest to stomach was that Thomas was a poet of obvious skill and intelligence who, without any sign of condescension or compromise, was giving a curious lay reader who might peek into his volume exactly what was wanted from poetry: a colourful and moving use of language inaccessible to prose. The confident manner in which Thomas emphasized the universality and contemporaneity of his work, while ostensibly dismissing the need for any audience at all, pushed this point thoroughly home:

> Not for the proud man apart
> From the raging moon I write
> On these spindrift pages
> Nor for the towering dead
> With their nightingales or psalms
> But for the lovers, their arms
> Round the griefs of the ages,
> Who pay no praise or wages
> Nor heed my craft or art.[59]

Thomas was obeying the impulses with which all poetry, and all love of poetry, begins: the urge to sing, to celebrate, to praise.

No lyric pleasantries can excuse the good-hearted mawkishness of Thomas's play *Under Milk Wood* (1954), and it is certain that Thomas drinking himself to death attracted a fascinated public interested primarily in the sensational, and confirmed a widespread impression that poets ought to be irresponsible and to die young. But not even those who, in the 1950s, appointed themselves a fire brigade to damp out neo-Romanticism could seriously deny that he had very great gifts, and that these gifts had found memorable expression.

The fire engine was manned by a new Oxbridge group. Of the nine contributors to Robert Conquest's *New Lines* anthology of 1956, six had been to Oxford and three to Cambridge. But there were departures from the MacSpaunday formula. Six of them were university teachers, and two were librarians—salaried servants of the educational machine; only three had attended major public schools. At the risk, once more, of oversimplification, one might point out that this new group could be taken as representative of changes that had occurred in the establishment itself as a result of universal education and of World War II. Meritocracy had widened the elite to include men with a taste of (if not for) the life style of the bald young clerks of Slough.

Conquest, in his introduction, reflected the mood of cautious empiricism and neo-liberalism that had followed the revelations of the massacre of European Jewry, the Hiroshima bomb, the crimes of Stalinism, and the advent of the Cold War:

> If one had briefly to distinguish this poetry of the fifties from its predecessors, I believe that the most important general point would be that it submits to no great system of theoretical constructs nor agglomeration of unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and—like modern philosophy—is empirical in its attitude to all that comes.

The chosen poets, revolted by "the images of sex and violence tapped straight from the unconscious" by the neo-Romantics, were linked also by a "refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language."[60] Just as obviously, they were linked by their academicism: "Florence: Design for a City," "A Plan of Self-Subjection," "Against Romanticism," "The Wondering Scholar," "Too Late for Satire," "Epistemology of Poetry," "Reasons for not Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry"—these were hardly titles to pull in the cash customers whom Philip Larkin (one of the contributors) wanted, unless in university bookshops. The deft and lucid free verse of D. J. Enright made him very much an odd man out among contributors who had gone back to a strictly formal rhymed verse, as did the preoccupation of his poems with "public" themes and his willingness to manifest sympathy for the underdog. Thom Gunn's poem beginning "Even in bed I pose," although it was not included in the anthology, epitomized its general spirit with the refrain, "You know I know you know I know you know."[61] If this poetry radiated even more self-consciousness than MacSpaunday's, it was partly because intellectual sophistication, in the wake of Auschwitz, seemed to prohibit rash commitments to any deep human emotions whatsoever.

Donald Davie's "Rejoinder to a Critic" expressed this tendency openly:

> "Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?"
> And recent history answers: Half Japan!
> Not love, but hate? Well, both are versions of
> The "feeling" that you dare me to . . . Be dumb!
> Appear concerned only to make it scan!
> How dare we now be anything but numb?[62]

The self-mockery here is eminently donnish. The highly "literary" command "Be dumb!" is like a knowing wink passed between poet, critic, and reader. Davie, like other *New Lines* poets (not including Larkin), recognized and implicitly accepted the emergence of a specialized university audience. What they offered this audience was a poetry performed on a stage-set of "difficult" ideas but presented in the reasonable accents of an "unstuffy" intellectual concerned to avoid any accusation of posing: an Eng. Lit. don, perhaps, addressing his colleagues in the Social Science faculty. The posture and the ideas expressed were certainly "modern," but the forms adopted were not, and the temper of this verse could hardly have been farther from that of the heroic pioneers of Modernism. Confronting another anthology published in the same year, a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer remarked that:

> The great foreign masters—Yeats above all, Mr Pound, Mr Eliot—have come to seem very remote. Without them, of course, everything would be very different, but their influence is subdued and occasional. The most inexhaustibly poetic race in Europe, the English are no doubt grateful for the glittering interlude, but they have got their breath back and returned to the careful, learned, sensitive minor poetic forms that befit a culture in decline.[63]

The *New Lines* poets took their various paths, some of them away from numbness, and the 1960s saw poetry recoiling from a spurious integration with society at the level of the Senior Common Room. Once again, an anti-establishment movement manifested itself, and (as before) this involved a democratization of the Muse, and her devolution to the provinces. A school of "Pop" poets flourished in Liverpool, which addressed the Beatles' audience directly in public readings; and Leeds, Newcastle, and Edinburgh became prominent centres of grass-roots activity, mostly by the very young.

In every sphere, the influence of American verse was suddenly very important. Academic criticism embraced the "confessional" poetry of Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath—men and women of impeccable education who had nevertheless chosen their own neuroses as their themes, or had been chosen by them. The horrors of a night of loveless marriage could be related to the evil within man that had manifested itself in Auschwitz and was now manifesting itself in Vietnam. A new critical approach agreed that Professor Davie's temporary emotional impasse could and should be overcome; the "confessional" poets and their English imitators invited the reader to join them in a species of group therapy, designed to purge the devils from their psyches. It was an oblique reaffirmation of Owen's poetic: to expose the truth on the domestic front was now the imperative.

For various grass-roots movements and trends, the influence of Pound, of Carlos Williams, and of the "Black Mountain" school of Robert Creeley and Charles Olson now took general precedence over native models. The spirit of Pound would manifest itself, for instance, in a long poem on a local historical theme broken in its narrative and peppered with prose extracts from the sources; the spirit of Williams in a friendly but naive presentation of the charms of the mundane; the presence of Creeley in a grunting, laconic notation of the minor tones of feeling. In total, however, the products of the new generation of poets resembled nothing so much as a new Georgianism. There was a similar attachment to English localities (although now these were often industrial towns), a similar eschewal of grandiose rhetoric, even a similar strain of wistful lyricism. All are apparent, for instance, in the work of Barry MacSweeney, born in Newcastle in 1948 and one of a cohort of poets from his native city:

> If it were winter
> and snowy, I would
> build a snowman,
> with comb mouth,
> eyes of dark blue buttons,
> nose of carrot, pipe
> of a toothbrush, as real
> as "The Thinker."
> But if you came
> along,
>   Ann,
> asking if you could

> knock it down,
> after all my effort,
> I would say yes.
> Yes my love.
> And after you had gone
> I would secretly rebuild it,
> and hide it from you.
> (Not wishing to hurt you.)[64]

Like the Georgians, such writers as MacSweeney can, without hubris, envisage an entire literate culture as their audience—in this case, the "pop" culture shared by the young of all classes, including students at the older universities. But this is at the expense of an innovating treatment of major themes; it involves moderating the intellectual challenge. For better or worse, Eliot's remarks in an essay of 1919 remain relevant for those who (like Pound or Carlos Williams themselves) wish poetry to be a major form, its frontiers extended beyond those of philosophy, but including them:

> It is wrong of Mr Kipling to address a large audience; but it is a better thing than to address a small one. The only better thing is to address the one hypothetical Intelligent Man who does not exist and who is the audience of the artist.[65]

It remains the case that most poets of great interest are "difficult," even if, like Dylan Thomas or Carlos Williams, their surface charm disguises it. Great verse is still not obviously suitable material for the mass audience. If the climate inhabited by poetry in Britain in 1970 seemed more hopeful than any experienced earlier in the century, this was perhaps a result of the genuine success of mass education; the complex and hermetic lyrics of the folk-singer Bob Dylan were readily accepted by a great part of a whole generation as part of their leisure-culture (as distinct from their "serious" reading or their academic culture), and this was surely an advance from the days of Newbolt.

Another hopeful expansion of authentic possibilities was the development in Britain of a very sizable audience for international poetry; the interest taken in America was only part of this phenomenon, which involved large sales of paperback translations of poets from Russia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, as well as those from the more familiar cultures of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.[66] In addition, first-rate poetry in English began to emerge from the West Indies (Edward Brathwaite) and from Africa (Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo). In an age when student revolutionaries might paradoxically found their thinking on Fanon, a prophet of the Third World, internationalism in thought and culture had clearly extended well south of the Mediterranean and east of the Urals—its traditional limits. For globe-trotting poets, such as the Russians Evtushenko and Voznesensky, the existence of an international audience was already a physically manifested fact, and their impact on Britain was considerable.[67]

A poet imagining, or constructing for himself, an international audience may be reassured by the fact that, even if the audience for major poetry in any one country is very tiny, and its potential for direct influence almost nil, the total of those truly at home with the medium all over the world is very much greater, and almost any form of international communication amounts, in the present unhappy state of the nations, to a worth-while form of influence.

An apprehension of these possibilities may perhaps underlie the recent work of Ted Hughes. Beginning in the 1950s with powerful verse rooted in the English tradition, and sufficiently taut and conventional to be accepted by the *New Lines* editor for his second anthology, Hughes has moved on to poetry informed by a stark and unlocalized imagination. He still exploits with devotion the special potentialities of English, especially those stemming from the Anglo-Saxon side of its genealogy. But his debts to a range of foreign influences—including a Yugoslav poet of great difficulty, Vasko Popa—now emerge clearly in an emphatic presentation of ideas and images and a technical freedom that present few barriers to effective translation. (Much would be lost in translation, but the imagery would remain in almost unsapped vigour.) Hughes's volume of 1970, *Crow*, immediately established an unusual popularity in Britain, and appeared to confirm his pre-eminence among British poets under 60. But beyond the local significance of his achievement, in an age of increasingly rapid communications, in a world in which international issues are increasingly related to national ones, such a style as Hughes's might be seen as a step toward the realization of Hugh MacDiarmid's vision of a "world poetry."

We have now moved, as a survey stretching to the present is almost bound to do, from the realm of assured facts and perspectives to that of speculation, and perhaps of wishful thinking. But it seems appropriate to end with Hughes's fierce and resonant reassertion, in "Crow's Last Stand," of the cardinal importance of the eye, which perceives the truths—comic, beautiful, or terrible—that make the poem, in any age, a supreme expression of human consciousness and of its understanding of itself.

> Burning
>   burning
>   burning
>   there was finally something

The sun could not burn, that it had rendered
Everything down to—a final obstacle
Against which it raged and charred

And rages and chars

Limpid among the glaring furnace clinkers
The pulsing blue tongues and the red and the yellow
The green lickings of the conflagration

Limpid and black—

Crow's eye-pupil, in the tower of its scorched fort.[68]

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CHAPTER 19

The Book Business in the USA

John Tebbel*

I

World book production, according to UNESCO, had reached an annual total of 400,000 titles in 1972—more than double the figure of a mere decade before. The problem of how to store and retrieve even the more noteworthy publications is becoming acute for librarians, particularly at universities. A study at Purdue University showed that, without technical aids such as microfilm, a research library would double its size in 17 years. Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the book is dying[1] should not make us overlook such statistics.

According to the 1972 UNESCO figures,[2] two thirds of the world's books in that year were produced by only 10 countries. Nearly 40 per cent appeared in the Western world, mainly in English, French, German, and Spanish. In Britain, publishing had a turnover in 1973 of over £236 million a year; at over $3500 million in 1974, the American trade was higher than ever before (although it was far surpassed in dollar volume by at least five other industries; moreover, in no Western country have book exports exceeded 1 per cent of total national exports). In every country, publishing has developed in the last century from a cottage industry to a form of mass production.† Nevertheless, the economics of publishing, and above all of marketing books, is not well understood.

In large measure this is because the essential nature of the industry remains unchanged. In essence, book publishing is an act of faith jointly pledged by author and publisher; but whereas the author's faith is pinned to his single production, the publisher's is more or less shrewdly distributed over a list of up to 500 or 600 books a year. Thus, faith unrewarded in one instance finds compensation in the pay-off from another. The trick is to make enough out of the few correct guesses to balance the bad or indifferent guesses, which by a kind of Gutenberg's Law will always be greater. There is little exaggeration in the famous remark of one publisher that his trade is "the largest floating crap game in the world."

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* Professor of Journalism, New York University.

† This subject is discussed in Vol. V, "Book Production and Distribution."

In spite of computerization and an attempt to apply modern merchandising methods, the publishing and selling of a book remain primitive compared with the methods employed by other industries. Marketing techniques commonplace in the selling of other products cannot be used to sell books. There is, for instance, no agreement among publishers as to what motivates people to buy books, nor is there adequate research to support anyone's theory. The industry spends little money on research into this fundamental question. Arguments about whether advertising, critical reception, word of mouth (the most popular notion), or some other motivation impels people to buy a book are usually resolved by agreement that it is a fortuitous combination of all these elements, but there are few hard data to support this idea either.

Part of the difficulty arises from the obvious fact that different books sell, or do not sell, for different reasons. Examples can always be cited of ecstatic reviews from leading critics that have greeted a first novel and made its author a celebrity almost overnight. There are far more instances, however, of books that have been given equal acclaim but have remained undisturbed on the bookshop shelf. Nor, in spite of what authors firmly believe, will heavy advertising sell a book that people do not want to buy. Conversely, word of mouth will sell a book that the critics despise or that has not been advertised. James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* (1947) was placed on the market without fanfare by its publishers and was hardly noticed by the critics, but for some reason booksellers and sales assistants in department stores responded enthusiastically to the book and it soon became a best-seller.

The peculiar nature of the book business is reflected in the form of contract between publisher and author. Lawyers are invariably astonished by their first encounter with it. As a legal document it is sieve-like, and in practice it is largely ignored. The author, for example, promises to deliver his manuscript by a certain date, but delivery on time is so rare that John O'Hara was celebrated and conspicuous in the trade for his prompt delivery of a new manuscript, almost every year, on Thanksgiving Day. The publisher agrees to pay a certain advance against royalties to be earned when the book is published. Yet, if the book fails to earn back its advance, by unwritten law the author is not required to return any money unless he later sells the book to another publisher and gets a fresh advance

—in which case he is expected to recompense the first publisher. None of this is stated in the contract, however. (In most British agreements the advance is not returnable.)

Nevertheless, these documents are often elaborate, and one American publisher even prints his in book style, with an index, instead of in the usual legal form. Agents and publishers wrangle mainly about the terms of the one important part of the agreement—how the proceeds from the sale of subsidiary rights and other earnings are to be divided between author and publisher. That is where the real money is likely to be for both parties to the agreement, especially in the case of a novel. Whether or not the book has a substantial trade sale becomes relatively unimportant if motion-picture rights, paperback rights, television rights, and dramatic rights are likely to be productive.

Contracts are easily and frequently broken by either party, often by mutual consent. If relations between an author and his publisher are unsatisfactory, the publisher may ignore the clause in the contract that gives him an option on the author's next work. No one wants to publish an author who is "not happy," as the saying goes. If a publisher happens to be callously indifferent to the happiness of the author and insists on his option, the agent will simply ask for an advance too high for the publisher to give, and the agreement lapses.

Unless an author has an established public, or his book has some obvious topical or sensational interest, the publisher has no way of estimating accurately in advance how many copies will sell. He sets an advertising budget based on some rough and ready formula, such as 10 per cent of the figure obtained by multiplying the first printing by the retail price. Usually it will be just enough to cover an announcement of the book in the trade journals and one or two small advertisements in the leading newspapers. In America, this figure in most cases would be about $2500.

One of the industry's chief weaknesses is the crawling pace of book production. Whereas it took four or five months to make a book in the early 1940s, even under wartime restrictions, it now takes the average trade publisher at least eight or nine months from the time the manuscript is received until the finished book is ready, except when a topical book demands a rush job. The history of publishing, indeed, is in part a history of how production bottlenecks were gradually overcome. For many years the binding process was a major cause of the slowdown. Today it is chiefly the crowded schedules of printing firms, and the jam that results from concentrating too many books in the spring and autumn lists. The intensely personal relationship between author and publisher, delays of delivery, proof-reading, getting the manuscript into final shape, and copy-editing, all complicate the production problem.

When at last a book appears, it will, in nine cases out of 10, be greeted by silence simply because the reviewing media cannot begin to keep up with the publishers' output. Review editors must choose from more than 20,000 new titles every year, and most make a conscientious effort to review those that they believe possess merit or interest. Some reviewers, especially in Europe, are concerned mainly with what they believe their readers *should* be interested in, rather than what the majority is actually reading—which annoys some people but is undoubtedly one of the functions of the true critic.

Here we confront the problem that bewitches publishers and authors alike: How are best-sellers made? In large degree the "made" best-seller is the result of clever merchandising. It begins with an idea, very often that of the publisher, who persuades an author to write it. There is even a group of authors whose *métier* is the "idea" book. In fiction, the idea these days is usually one having to do with sex; in non-fiction, it is most likely to be one appealing to a fundamental emotion, as in advertising—fear, greed, the need for sex, vanity. Or it can be based on an important controversial figure, or a news-worthy event. The writing is customarily done in a style deliberately aimed at a known popular market. This is true even of fiction. One author of best-selling novels about sex plans his plot structures with mathematical precision, separating his sex episodes by 20 pages of narration. One of his biggest sellers, moreover, was constructed in the classic pattern of the pornographic novel, in which the episodes begin with simple copulation and gradually work up to complicated forms

The rest of the job is old-fashioned selling, in which the idea is merchandised like soap or breakfast cereals. It involves high-pressure advertising of a kind not normally associated with books, which are generally announced or listed or exhibited in ways that have not changed since the 19th century. The "idea" book, however, is packaged and sold with as much skill as a new toothpaste, not only in the advertising media but sometimes in the stores as well. If the author is an attractive woman, an autographing tour of the booksellers is in order. If she is also a shrewd promoter in her own right and happens to be married to a professional in the field, there occurs a situation such as that of Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* (1966), which was sold aggressively across the country by the author and her husband. The novel sold in millions, especially the paperback edition.

To illustrate the perversity of the business, however, one need only recall that the single work of fiction to have sold more than *Valley of the Dolls* is Grace Metalious's *Peyton Place* (1957), whose author not only was not a glamorous figure or a promoter but seemed content to sit back and let the book sell itself. The publisher's promotion helped in some degree, but *Peyton Place* is one of those books that seem to sell by word of mouth. In its depiction of small-town life, it could be said to have provided characters with whom the American reader could identify. But, of course, this is not in itself a criterion of a best-seller, as *Valley of the Dolls* shows, for the latter is about barely disguised show-business figures: it has since been followed by other, lesser best-sellers exploiting the same device.

II

The American public is influenced by the best-seller list much more than readers in other Western countries.* A proportion (no one knows how large) of the book-buying public determines its reading entirely by these lists. Best-sellers, with all the subsidiary rights that they carry—especially paperback, book club distribution, magazine serialization, and motion-picture rights—have earned some authors a million dollars or more on a single book. This chance to hit the jackpot unquestionably has something to do with the steady outpouring of words in America, from typewriter and printing press, although very few of the 20,000 new titles every year make much money.

The pattern of sales among America's better-known literary figures—as distinguished from those who are best-selling but not literary—discloses statistics both odd and astonishing. Some of these statistics are little known, because it is difficult to obtain sales totals from most publishers, even long after publication. (Computerization is now making such information more accessible.) Industry records compiled outside the publishing houses are usually kept in overall totals that include hard-cover and soft-cover editions; figures for hard-cover editions are not always separately available. In considering these sometimes astronomical totals, it is well to remember that they are largely the result of the great paperback boom. As regards sales of hard-cover editions, no author since World War I has come anywhere near the totals achieved by two novelists, Gene Stratton-Porter and the Reverend Harold Bell Wright, between 1900 and 1920. Wright's 19 books sold a total of more than 10 million copies in hard covers; three of his five best-sellers sold more than a million each. Mrs Stratton-Porter's books, also 19, sold nine million in hard covers, and earned $2 million for her.

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* The term *best-seller* is an arbitrary one, because all the lists exclude the Bible, perennially the number one best-seller, as well as cookbooks, textbooks, manuals, and other items that steadily outsell the general trade books listed.

It is difficult not to be impressed by Erskine Caldwell (b. 1903), who has been taken seriously by the critics from time to time, and whose dozen best-sellers have sold more than 41 million copies. Only one of these, *Georgia Boy* (1943), had a really large hard-cover sale: 490,000. *God's Little Acre* (1933), with total sales of over eight million, sold only 20,000 in hard covers, and *Tobacco Road* (1932) achieved only 6000, although it sold about three and a half million copies in paperback. Again, *Journeyman* (1935) recorded just under four million in paperback, but its hard-cover edition reached only 1500. It has been estimated that in 1949 about 20 million copies of his books in all editions were in circulation throughout the world.

John Steinbeck (1902–68) is a near rival of Caldwell's, with 11 best-sellers totalling 15 million copies. *Cannery Row* (1945) leads them all, with a total of 2,330,000, of which 30,000 were in hard covers. *The Pearl* (1945) follows closely, with a total of 2,310,000, and a meagre 10,000 hard-cover sale. Some of Steinbeck's work has sold well in hard covers, however, such as *East of Eden* (1952), 150,000; *The Wayward Bus* (1947), 520,000; and *Travels with Charley* (1962), 574,000.

William Faulkner (1897–1962) was in somewhat the same situation. His three best-sellers totalled nearly four million in sales, but his best-known novel, *Sanctuary* (1931), sold only 6000 in hard covers. *The Wild Palms* (1939), however, reached nearly 500,000. *The Reivers*, published a month before Faulkner died, won the Pulitzer Prize and managed to get on the best-seller list, but its hard-cover sale was quite small.

Ernest Hemingway (1898–1961) did rather better. His six best-sellers sold a total of about four million copies, and two of his books nearly reached the one million mark in hard covers: *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) sold 805,000 and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) 800,000. By comparison, *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950), with 104,000, and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), with 68,000, were only moderate successes.

One of the most difficult authors to assess statistically is Sinclair Lewis (1885–1961). Available figures indicate that his total sales were probably between three and four million, distributed among 10 best-sellers; *Elmer Gantry* (1927) was by far his most successful book, with one million copies in paperback and 200,000 in hard covers. *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), with 800,000 copies, of which 115,000 were in hard covers, is probably next. *Main Street* (1920), his best-known book, sold about 295,000 copies in hard covers, but *Babbitt* (1922) did considerably less well, although it remained on the best-seller list for two years.

Among more recent writers of distinction, John O'Hara and J. D. Salinger are the leaders in sales. O'Hara (1905–70) wrote seven best-sellers with sales totalling between eight and nine million copies. *Butterfield 8* (1935) was his first and most successful; it sold three and a half million in paperback, and 77,000 in hard covers. *A Rage to Live* (1949) recorded a total of nearly two million copies, and sold 139,000 in hard covers. The sale of *From the Terrace* (1958) was almost exactly the same in total figures; no statistics are available for its hard-cover sale, but in the first month after publication it sold 96,000 copies. In 1960, O'Hara achieved the distinction of having two titles—*Ourselves to Know* (1960) and *Sermons and Soda-Water* (1960), a collection of short stories—on the best-seller list simultaneously, the first time this had occurred since 1935.

Salinger (b. 1919), as sparse a producer as O'Hara was prolific, has written only three best-sellers, compared with O'Hara's seven, but they have totalled about six million in sales. Oddly, his most celebrated book, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), did not reach any annual compilation of best-sellers, but over the years it has sold a total of about four and a half million copies, some 400,000 of them in hardback. *Franny and Zooey* (1961) did nearly as well in hardback, with about 300,000, but sold only one million in paperback. *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* and *Seymour: an Introduction* (1963), two novellas, published as one book, has sold about 100,000 in hard covers.

Other contemporaries come farther down the list. James Baldwin (b. 1924) has three best-sellers, with a total of four million copies. Norman Mailer (b. 1923) has written two major popular successes: *The Naked and The Dead* (1948) and *The Deer Park* (1955) have sold nearly the same total number, but the first sold nearly 400,000 in hard cover, the latter a mere 10,000. James Jones (b. 1921), also with two best-sellers, has sold about five million. Nelson Algren (b. 1909) has a total of three and a half million for his two best-sellers, one of which, *Never Come Morning* (1942), sold 300,000 in hard covers. Saul Bellow (b. 1915), although widely admired, has had only one best-seller, *Herzog* (1964), which sold more than one million copies in paperback and 145,000 in hard covers.

Surprisingly, America has even had a few best-selling poets, although none is likely to surpass Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82), whose total sales were well over one and a half million during his lifetime. *In the Clearing* (1962) by Robert Frost (1874–1963) sold more than 100,000 copies, and an anthology of his work, edited by Louis Untermeyer in 1949, topped the million mark. Stephen Vincent Benet (1898–1943) sold 755,630 copies of *John Brown's Body* (1928) in hard covers, after an unprecedented first printing of 70,000 copies. Edna St Vincent Millay (1892–1950) also became a best-selling poet in 1931 with *Fatal Interview*, for which no exact figures are available.

A sad note in this chronicle of affluence among the *literati* is F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), who never reached the best-seller list at all. Ironically, a novel based on his life, *The Disenchanted* by Budd Schulberg, sold 255,000 copies, including book-club editions, in 1950. Thomas Wolfe and Nathanael West are other American novelists of high literary merit who never wrote best-sellers.

Popular writers laying no claims to great literary distinction owe most of their large sales figures to paperback reprints. Although accurate figures are extremely hard to come by in publishing, it is safe to say that Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) has sold most of its more than nine million copies in paperback. For a handful of authors, paperback sales have been astronomical. Erle Stanley Gardner, for instance, has total sales of more than 110 million copies; 60 of his titles have sold more than a million each, and 11 of these have sold more than two million. Other popular writers, such as Harold Robbins, Zane Grey, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Mickey Spillane, Frank Yerby, and Ellery Queen, have also sold in the millions. Among non-fiction works, Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* had sold 16 million copies by 1965, and since then has been selling at a rate of about a million a year.

How much did these sometimes staggering sales mean in cash for their authors? Unfortunately, it is impossible to do much more than guess because these figures are virtually impossible to obtain, or even to estimate. In general, it can be said that returns are relatively small in hardback sales, even for major authors; $75,000 would not be an unreasonable average. However, subsidiary earnings, particularly paperback and motion-picture rights, have made multi-millionaires of many authors. Truman Capote (b. 1924), for instance, made more than one million dollars out of a single book, *In Cold Blood* (1966). Bidding for paperback rights has resulted in sales varying from $100,000 to more than a million dollars. Dell Publishing Co. lured James Jones away from Scribner's with a million-dollar contract. A motion-picture sale of more than half a million dollars for a best-seller is no longer a rarity; William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a major best-seller of 1967, was sold to Hollywood for $650,000. Best-selling novels made dollar millionaires out of Caldwell, Mailer, Jones, Faulkner, Hemingway, Lewis, O'Hara, Salinger, and

Steinbeck, besides many other writers who hardly pretended to serious literary writing.

III

When one considers the case of the average novel, however, statistics plunge to an extremely depressing level, and the true nature of trade publishing becomes much more evident. If a novel sells for $5, the first printing will probably be no more than 5000 copies. The advertising and promotion budget may be anywhere from $1500 to $2500, which will be just enough to call attention to its existence. In the curious economics of publishing, it is not advisable to spend much money on advertising or promotion unless the book begins to sell, when a campaign may further push the sales figures upward to the point where word of mouth and attention in the reviewing media may carry it to the best-seller list. Hence the perennial complaint of authors that only books that are already selling are advertised extensively.

There is a nicety of timing involved here that a good many publishers bungle. Let us imagine that a first edition of a book, 5000 copies, has sold well, though not spectacularly. Another printing of 5000 will put the book in the black, especially if there is accompanying advertising and promotion. This represents another investment for the publisher, however, beyond the initial one that he has made, and if the second printing does not sell, he will lose substantially more money, whereas at 5000 he may break even (although the break-even point is generally nearer 7500). The decision to reprint must be made before the first edition has sold out, so that the second printing can be ordered and delivered from the printer to the book-stores, otherwise a time gap will occur when the initial demand for the book persists and the new stock has not yet arrived. If the gap is too great, the impetus of the initial sale runs out, the book is lost in the flood of new arrivals, and the second printing is a loss to publisher and bookseller.

Distribution, even more than production, is beset with problems in America. Although practices are beginning to change under increasing pressure, books are still sold primarily as they have always been, through retail book-stores, of which there are almost 500 in the United States. Psychologically, it is not as easy to lure people into book-stores in America as it is in Europe. Habitual book readers, of course, are not the problem. It is the readers who are discovering books, or casual readers. For obscure reasons, many Americans who find no difficulty in going to any other kind of store for a specific article are intimidated by the book-store. It has been said that they feel insecure about their intellectual or literary interests, and are afraid that they will be patronized. One of the common letters of inquiry that publishers receive is the request to be told where the writer can go to get a certain book. Apparently, a book-store does not occur to them.

The retail book-store's problems are threefold. One is the difficulty of knowing what to buy among the nearly 30,000 titles published in a year, and how to display the selected books. Many stores solve this difficulty in the simplest possible way. Best-sellers are stacked face up on a table near the door. The others are placed on shelves, spines outward, as in a library, except perhaps where specialty books and "coffee table" items with handsome jackets are displayed full-face. Although booksellers in the United States are as a whole a highly literate group, and some are good salesmen and better-than-ordinary merchandisers as well, they are hampered not only by lack of space and the flood of books, but also by the impossibility of getting adequate staff. Booksellers operate on what is perhaps the lowest profit margin in any American business, and the same may be said of their European counterparts. Many, if not most, cannot afford to sell only books, but have sidelines in stationery, records, circulating libraries, and gift items.

Let us now imagine a novel of the more promising sort, selling at $5.95 retail with a first printing of 10,000. It costs about $1.40 a copy to make the book, and the author takes about 60 cents in royalties on each sale, paid against an advance ranging from perhaps $1000 upward, depending on his status and the potential sale of the book (an average advance could be about $2500). About 30 cents per copy will be spent on promotion and advertising. In getting the book into the stores, the wholesaler will take from 20 to 60 cents per copy, and the bookseller retains about $2.20 for every copy he sells. In most cases, he may return the books he has not sold, and the publisher sells these eventually to discount houses for about 30 cents per copy, in the process known as remaindering. Out of his $2.20 profit, the bookseller has little left when his expenses are added up. Nor is the publisher better off, for he incurs full expenses (around $5) on all copies, but makes money only on those that are sold. One of the largest New York publishing houses estimates that only 4 per cent of its trade books earn a profit. About 60 per cent of the others lose money. The remaining 36 per cent break even. On the novel cited above, the publisher would make at most $1 per copy if he sold all 10,000 printed.

For many years American booksellers have been fighting the publishers over discounts (which are not uniform, but are usually about 40 per cent), and even more so over policies governing the return of unsold books, over shipping, promotion, and book-club distribution; in practice these vary greatly from publisher to publisher, and they reflect a system that is as out-of-date as the accounting procedures still used in many houses.

The paperback boom, which has meant so much to the publisher, has only increased the retailer's worries. He has a formidable display problem, faced with the tidal wave of paperback books: it is estimated that the average life of such a book on the display rack is nine days, during which it must sink or swim. The conventional book-store must also face the competition of other outlets. In America there are at least 120,000 outlets for paperback books; these include drug-stores, transport terminals, vending machines, and stores that carry paperbacks as side-lines. Far more outlets are needed to meet the demand for display space; failure to meet this demand caused a substantial drop in sales during 1968.

IV

When one looks at the structure and practices of the publishing business in America, the wonder is that books are published and sold at all. As far as the author of the general trade book is concerned, he is almost invariably a loser. It is estimated that only 300 people in America are able to earn a living entirely by writing, although some 10 million are trying to write. Certainly the average author earns little from his book, often no more than the small advance he gets. Even a moderately successful book will not bring him much more than $10,000—if that—unless subsidiary rights are sold, and it must be remembered that relatively few books are translated into successful paperbacks, or films, or any other rewarding medium. In Britain, a 1966 survey by the Society of Authors showed that only one author out of 10 earned more than £550 a year, and nearly two thirds averaged less than £300. One third earned no more than £1.50 a week.

The author takes a far greater gamble than the publisher because he has only one product to show for his time and effort. Yet if the publisher had no more than trade books to sell, he would not be much better off than the average author. In fact, however, he is the proprietor of a highly diversified business. The part of publishing that the public sees in reviews and advertising accounts for only about a quarter of the business. Most successful publishers earn their profits from textbook divisions, educational materials, paperback lines, backlist books that are perennial sellers, and long-established series such as Everyman's and the Modern Library. They also supplement their income with a share of whatever subsidiary rights are sold.

As with newspapers, the tendency among publishing houses has been to merge, with each other and with large corporations. In America there has been a move by electronics companies to acquire publishing houses that have textbooks and educational material to sell: that is, "software" that the industrialists hope to marry to their "hardware," such as teaching machines and audio-visual devices. They are, in brief, trying to buy their way into the biggest industry in America, education. The result is that publishing houses see themselves listed on the Stock Exchange, hear themselves talked about on Wall Street as "growth stocks," and find themselves accountable to shareholders.

The results are not always salutary. Immediately beneficial is the flow of capital into an industry that has always been starved of it, and the consequent expansion and exploration that this makes possible. But the shareholders are another matter. They look at a trade department that consistently loses money every year and want to know why it cannot be discontinued. There is, in fact, no advantage in maintaining trade departments from a purely financial standpoint. Few of them make any money. But publishers, especially those brought up in the old school, look upon themselves as the inheritors and protectors of the literary tradition—which they are—and consider it an obligation to publish fiction, biography, poetry, history, and *belles-lettres*. Besides, for the publisher who loves books and reads them, this is where the fun and meaning of publishing reside. It is what the book business used to be about.

A new breed of men is rising, however, that takes a different view of publishing. Their enjoyment in what they are doing derives from the same source that satisfies businessmen selling any other product: the excitement of the game of business itself. It is this, far more than the love of money for its own sake, or even for what it will buy, that motivates the typical hard-driving businessman, whether he is in books or in gadgets. For these people a publishing house is a diversified business enterprise selling products to a wide market; for them the literary or aesthetic satisfactions of publishing are either non-existent or the concern of the trade-department staff.

More and more the emphasis in publishing is on education, because that is where the money is. In dollar volume, educational books represent the largest part of publishing in the United States. Whereas once hardbound textbooks were the only products of these divisions, the broad term "educational materials" now includes a wide variety of other printed and visual forms used in teaching. The textbook market is not without risks, however, and is highly competitive. Outlays of one or two million dollars or more may be required to plan and publish a series of elementary or high-school texts, and there is no assurance that this money will be recouped if another publisher produces a better line, or is a better salesman. Textbook publishers must also deal with the politics of the trade, involving state superintendents of public instruction who do the buying for an entire state school system, either by themselves or through deputies or boards. Sometimes this buying is done at a local level, where the problems are simply multiplied. Twenty states prescribe the physical dimensions and binding for the schoolbooks they buy. There are problems of censorship, too, both direct and indirect, often resulting in a careful laundering of content so that regional or even local sensibilities will not be ruffled to the detriment of sales. In spite of every precaution, however, the vigilante spirit of die-hard right-wing Americans provides a continuing challenge to every schoolbook, particularly to those in the social studies, where the vigilantes are most insistent on their own versions of tradition, myth, and dogma.

Another gradual shift of emphasis in publishing is evident in the growing mail-order business, which now constitutes about 25 per cent of the book industry. Mail-order publishing has found a new and extremely profitable outlet in the kind of publication that combines book and magazine techniques: magazines in book form, so to speak, that owe much to the techniques of presentation pioneered by magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, and are sold by sophisticated mass-marketing techniques. Many publishing houses today have mail-order departments or divisions; moreover, one must not forget old-fashioned subscription selling (done now by new-fashioned merchandising methods), and the special arrangements made between publishers and the manufacturers of other consumer products, resulting in such ventures as cookbooks sponsored by packaged-food producers who promote them by mail.

Mail-order publishing is often described by its proponents as the shape of the future. They point not only to its present successes but to the electronic time to come, possibly within the next 25 years, when all kinds of shopping, including book-buying, could be done at home by means of dial systems and advertising through special television channels. As matters stand, however, there appear to be certain limitations that inevitably affect the growth of this kind of publishing. For instance, the cost of producing and selling these books is often astronomical (although there are cheap lines, too); consequently, they are in the upper price bracket and therefore a luxury. In an affluent society, they are affordable luxuries, nevertheless, as the sales figures prove. Another possible limitation is the point—not yet reached—when serious consumer resistance develops to the flood of coupons and direct-mail advertisements.

Whatever the limits of mail-order publishing may prove to be, however, they are not yet in sight. The history of this type of publishing, at least in America, goes back to the early 19th century; but it has been transformed in recent years by merchandising techniques that have left the traditional publishers far behind. The rise of organizations such as Time-Life Books and the American Heritage Publishing Company has been phenomenal. The latter is less than 20 years old, yet it is already one of the most successful publishing houses in the world. Time-Life Books is only half as old, but it accounts for more than 8 per cent of Time, Inc.'s corporate business. Its total sales for the first five years were more than 40 million copies of more than 200 books in the United States and Canada, and more than five million copies abroad, with translations into 13 languages.

American Heritage, which specializes in history, publishes heavily illustrated hard-cover books, as well as the hard-cover magazine of that name. Its substantial list of re-creations of history has been successful beyond the dreams of the men who founded the great publishing houses. Its outstanding success has been *The Civil War*, a book selling for the ordinarily prohibitive price of $19.95, with a *de luxe* edition at $25. The publisher spent two million dollars to produce this book, but it rewarded him with a gross sale of eight million dollars. When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, American Heritage was by far the most successful of the publishers that capitalized on the event, with a quick-order book about the assassination and funeral entitled *Four Days*, distributed through United Press International and its client newspapers by means of coupon advertisements. This book had sales worth more than two and a half million dollars, and in one day one newspaper alone took more than 25,000 orders.

Particularly important in connection with mail-order publishing is the operation of book clubs, which have become a formidable business-within-a-business. In a little more than 40 years of existence, for example, the Book-of-the-Month Club has distributed more than 200 million books to its members, with 618 selections chosen from more than 87,000 titles. Publishers submit an average of 2500 books to this club alone every year, and galleys of many titles are automatically forwarded to the club as part of normal publishing-house operations. In addition to its choices, the club has recommended and sold another 20,000 titles to its customers. Some of the largest publishers have their own book clubs, tailored for both special and general audiences; one company has 30 different book clubs and "programmes."

The completely equipped publishing house, then, if it were to function ideally in the contemporary world, would have a trade department that projected the firm's image and produced several best-sellers a year. It would have a textbook division, catering for both the college and the elementary- and high-school field, and producing such things as programmed instructions for teaching machines and other educational materials. It would have a mail-order department geared to mass-market sales and using the most modern merchandising methods. It would have at least one book club, probably more. Finally, it would have a subscription department, whose principal product would be, say, an encyclopaedia or two. The company would, of course, have a division devoted to overseas sales.

A few American publishing firms already approach this ideal. If the present trend of mergers and acquisitions continues to its logical conclusion, it may be that the American publishing industry will ultimately consist of a few multi-pronged organizations, existing as wholly owned subsidiaries of giant industrial corporations, presumably based on electronics.*

V

This prospect may sound frightening, and some publishers in Europe, who see themselves as defenders of a more cultured, elite tradition, may reject it as typically American. Yet it is obvious to many who study the international publishing scene that we are all headed toward the same future, if by different routes. It is not a question of the triumph of brash American methods over the more traditional and genteel ways of doing business. What will compel change are two factors: the growth of population, and the proliferation of knowledge. The key word in publishing today is "information." Publishers are beginning to see themselves as clearing-houses for an accumulating body of knowledge that must somehow be organized into coherent segments and made available for transmission to millions of people. The emergence of the mass market in every country, coupled with the new technology that is transforming publishing as it is transforming everything else, has created an entirely new view of the future.

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* Two features of American publishing at present stand outside, and may resist, this trend. One is university publishing. In 1967 there were 67 members of the Association of American University Presses; they publish an impressive number of scholarly and semi-scholarly books and distribute directly to libraries and trade. Some people believe that the university presses will one day print the kind of book that commercial publishers may no longer be able to undertake: serious books with small markets, even books of poetry or first novels—the kind of works, in short, that the more old-fashioned reader calls "literature." The other feature is the federal government, whose publications exceed the output of the entire national industry.

New possibilities are being explored all the time. For instance, there appears to be a growing number of people who want to have books read to them. Developed as a service to the blind, this kind of product has recently begun to tap a new market by means of the cassette tape recorder, into which the cassette tapes bearing either music or talk can be inserted as cartridges, automatically threaded and immediately playable. Such recorders are now optional equipment in many automobiles, and it will soon be possible for the man who is often too busy to read many books to listen to condensed versions of them on tape as he drives.

It is above all information, rather than literary expression, that lends itself to transmission by the new technology. The sheer quantity of information available in the world makes it essential that some kind of storage and retrieval system other than books be created to make it easily available to those who require it. Some significant steps in this direction are already being taken. The Library of Congress in Washington has studied methods of automating bibliographic operations—not only card catalogues but purchasing, circulation, and other library procedures—and now sends tapes listing standard catalogue data to many other libraries in the United States. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is developing, under the code name Intrex (Information Transfer Experiment), a synthesis of all the available methods—magnetic tape, microfilm, facsimile, xerography, and others—to create a system of storage and retrieval that will be both efficient and economical. Library networks linked by computer are also being developed; and the distribution of medical information was carried a long step forward with the creation of Medlar (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval), a system in which the National Library of Medicine has indexed 2400 biomedical journals.

Book-buying may also be revolutionized by the machine. Various schemes are being discussed, including one that envisages a book-store that would keep up with the flood of books by retaining in stock only those known to be in immediate demand. A customer who wanted anything else would simply place his order, which would be transmitted by wire to a system of central warehouses; here a computer would punch out a taped order for the desired book to another machine, which would retrieve the volume from a bin, wrap it, address it, and send it off down a mail chute for direct delivery to the customer.

A fantastic system, already technically feasible, envisages an enormous central library, or perhaps a series of regional libraries, each containing on microfilm every book in print. The reader at home would have a code book, constantly supplemented, enabling him to dial a library on a telephone-like device and to request by electronic impulse any book he desired. If the book was in use, he would be automatically switched to another library, or (in some versions) to a complicated duplicating section. When the tape was available, it would be transmitted on a special series of television channels, operating by laser beams off continuously orbiting earth satellites. Received on the home screen, the pages would turn slowly, at a speed determined by the viewer. A page of any publication (magazine, newspaper, or book) could be stopped on the screen and duplicated by means of a copying device attached to the television set.

Some version of this idea is likely to emerge within the next 20 years, and its implications are already causing controversy and study, particularly in the matter of copyright. This, of course, is a matter of international concern in the present state of affairs. The development of copying machines and their use in libraries has raised serious questions. Then there was the rude shock of the Stockholm Protocol of July 1967, an addition to the Berne Copyright Convention of 1886 that will permit developing countries to expropriate copyright books from developed countries and print them at will. It was estimated that this might cost British publishers alone as much as £10 million annually in loss of sales.

The United States is not a signatory to the Berne Convention but has adhered to its restrictions on international publishing. Its own copyright law, enacted in 1891, began to be revised in the early 1960s, and in the version of 1967 limited the exemption for copying and use of copyright material by libraries, schools, and educational television. In the struggle over this law, authors and publishers found themselves pitted, strangely, against the people they had thought were their best friends, the schoolteachers. Organized education fought the restrictions because schools, always hard pressed for money, were copying freely from copyright books to provide classroom material without having to buy the original volumes. Libraries were also providing this service for researchers.

If this practice continues unchecked, publishing in any conventional sense will in time be impossible. Various licensing systems have been suggested, usually a small fee to be paid for each use of a book, the size of the fee to depend on how much is copied. Any such system, however, will not apply to the ultimate microfilm library, except that books already in print could exact a fee for each use of the microfilm version, the money to be divided between author and publisher. But what of the books written *after* the microfilm library is established? Theoretically only one copy of a book would be necessary, which would eliminate publishing as we know it now.

Modern publishers are taking these developments very seriously. In an effort, perhaps futile, to protect itself, one publishing house has already changed its customary copyright notice to read: "All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photo-copy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system. . . ."

VI

The proliferation of printed matter has also pried open doors once held tightly shut by censorship. Publishing today operates, at least in the Western world, within a framework of freedom hardly contemplated at the beginning of the century. In the United States, works that only a few years ago would have been prosecuted in the courts are being published freely. In the Scandinavian countries, where freedom has been greater than anywhere else, Denmark in 1967 removed censorship entirely, with a subsequent 50 per cent fall in pornographic book sales; Danes, indeed, almost stopped buying these books, leaving them to the foreign tourists.

Although censorship is still imposed in varying degrees in other countries, the trend in the Western world is steadily in the direction of greater freedom. At the same time, a new responsibility is placed on publishers: not the negative one of trying to suppress what is bad, but the positive one of making sure that what is good is made available.

A remark often heard in publishing circles is that books are the last free forum in the world. Newspapers once ranked as their equal in this respect, but the trend toward monopoly or closure has slowly diminished their diversity, and a substantial portion of the world press is either under some kind of government control or severely limited by economic factors. In most non-communist countries magazines depend for their survival on advertising, and so they have come to reflect the conservative business interests of their advertisers. Electronic journalism is considerably restrained by government in the United States, and elsewhere is likely to be entirely controlled by government. But books, which are free of advertising influence and of government controls in most of the Western world, present a remarkable diversity of viewpoint. The trend toward bigness in book publishing has not yet led to the danger of monopoly.

The publisher of tomorrow will have the task of supplying a greater diversity of needs than the book business has ever before been called upon to provide. There is the ever-present danger of quality being sacrificed for quantity, and the conscientious publisher will try to prevent this from happening in every way he can. The "quality" market has always been small in proportion to the total population, and it will continue to be so as the total population, and literacy, increase. Nevertheless, publishers will have abdicated their responsibility completely if they do not preserve the existence of that market and continue to supply it.

References

1. For instance, MARSHALL MCLUHAN, *Understanding Media* (paperback: London 1973).
2. Some confusion surrounds these statistics owing to disagreement about what constitutes a book. For instance, Italy defines a book as a publication of at least 100 pages; UNESCO prescribes 49 pages but excludes periodicals; India allows even pamphlets.

CHAPTER 20

Publishing in Communist Countries

David Floyd*

I

Publishing is a state monopoly in the Soviet Union, communist China, and all the other countries that have adopted the Soviet or Chinese model of Communism. It is of the essence of the communist system that there should be no free enterprise in the field of publishing, whether of books or newspapers or theatre programmes, despite the formal guarantees of freedom of speech and the press given in the Soviet and other constitutions. The monopoly is defended with all the force of the law and breaches of it are severely punished; it is enforced by an elaborate system of controls and censorship far more efficient in the case of the Soviet Union than the controls over literature and the press exerted by the tsarist government. Publishing in a communist society is at once an integral part of the "planned economy" and an essential element in the machinery of propaganda and indoctrination. There are no independent publishers, and it is only in a very limited sense that one can speak of competition between publishing houses or of a book "market." The whole publishing trade is highly centralized and, like every other economic activity, subject to planning.

The extent of the monopoly in the Soviet Union is revealed by the fact that writers who want to publish their works despite the censor's refusal to approve them have to resort to the process known as *samizdat*, meaning "publish-it-yourself," by which manuscripts are reproduced by means of a typewriter and carbon paper and passed from hand to hand. Such works, of course, reach a very small readership. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose works have reached a wide public outside the Soviet Union but are disapproved of by the Soviet authorities, was prevented from publishing anything in Russia after 1963. A further measure of the importance that the Soviet authorities attach to absolute control of the press and publishing was provided by the Russian invasion and occupation of

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* Special Correspondent on Communist Affairs for *The Daily Telegraph* (London).

Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Czech leaders' removal of controls over publishing—a significant feature of their reforms—and the consequent emergence of independent and uncensored publications was cited by the Russians as clear proof that the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was on the verge of collapse.

There can be no doubt about the importance that communist rulers attach to the printed word, in the newspapers or between hard or soft covers, and consequently to their control of it. The entry on book publishing in the official Soviet encyclopaedia says: "The book is a powerful weapon for the political and cultural advance of the peoples and a most important means of conducting the communist education of the masses." It is only in the light of this basic attitude that the business of book publishing under Communism can be properly understood.

It is certainly a big business, to judge from the figures. The Soviet Union claims in fact to be the largest publisher of books in the world and to have 233 publishing houses operating on a nationwide (all-union) or republican scale. It is said to account for one quarter of all the books and pamphlets published each year throughout the world. The total number of copies produced in 1967 was 1243 million, compared with 1100 million copies in 1958. According to figures collected by the United Nations Organization, the Soviet Union issued 54,732 titles in 1955, 69,072 in 1959, and 65,609 in 1966. In 1969 the Soviet Union claimed to have published 74,587 books and pamphlets totalling more than 1300 million copies, and an average edition per book of 17,600 copies. The 1966 figure was compared with 50,286 for the United States and 22,902 for the United Kingdom. It is doubtful, however, whether these figures are directly comparable because the Soviet figures include minor publications not included by the other countries. Thus, of the total of 74,587 titles said to have been published in the USSR in 1969, only 41,317 were of books and pamphlets actually put on sale, the rest having been distributed free. What is more, the Soviet figures are inflated by the large number of books published as part of the programme of political indoctrination and not necessarily in response to reader demand. Commenting on the state of the publishing trade in 1968 a Soviet newspaper said:

> In the course of the last 50 years [i.e. since the Revolution of 1917] 399,000 books and brochures on political and socio-economic subjects have been issued in the Soviet Union. There has been a steady increase in study of the works of the founders of scientific Communism. The works of Marx and Engels have been published in 77 languages with a total edition of 84 million copies. The works of Lenin have been issued in 98 different languages with a total edition of 331 million copies.

The practice of printing enormous runs of books considered politically desirable is well established in the Soviet Union. The first print of a biography of Stalin published in 1947 and calculated to promote the "cult" of his personality ran to one million copies. The "Short Course" in the history of the Soviet Communist Party, which was compulsory reading for many years, ran to many millions of copies. Even today, the verbatim report of a congress of the Communist Party will be issued in 250,000 copies. The production of this and similar political material at the behest of the party leaders greatly swells the book-publishing figures in the Soviet Union.

That it is the business of Soviet publishing houses to produce works that the public *ought* to read, rather than ones they might want to read, was well illustrated in an article in *Pravda* in 1971 by a Ukrainian communist official. On the question of subject-matter, he wrote:

> In the communist education of the working people there is an exceptionally important part to be played by heroic-revolutionary and military-patriotic literature. In the course of the last year alone more than 400 such works have been published in the Ukraine. In the series "Fighters for a Great Cause," "Heroes, Years, and Achievements," and "Young Heroes," and in the memoirs of famous partisan commanders, readers have found many striking and memorable pages about people made of Lenin's stuff and about the heroism of the Soviet people. . . . If we are to produce books that will not remain unsold on the bookshelves there must be a well-thought-out planning of subjects, competent reviewing of manuscripts, creative collaboration between publishing houses and research institutes, and a well-developed sense of what the public wants. The book-publishing business needs daily supervision by the party.[1]

II

The publishing business in the Soviet Union is divided among the publishing houses mainly according to the subject-matter of the books produced. One publisher will not usually produce more than one type of book. For example, the publishing of Russian classical authors and of established contemporary Russian writers is handled almost exclusively by the Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury (State Publishers of Belles-Lettres). Contemporary Soviet writers who have not yet made a name for themselves have to turn to such publishers as Sovietsky Pisatel (The Soviet Writer), Sovietskaya Rossiya (Soviet Russia), or Molodaya Gvardia (The Young Guard), all of which publish on an all-union scale. (In practice a young writer will turn in the first place to one of the literary reviews, such as *Novy Mir*, *Zvezda*, *Oktyabr*, or others with a smaller, local circulation. It is after he has achieved some success in such publications, which have circulations running into hundreds of thousands, that he may have his work published in hard covers by one of the national publishers.)

The publication of literature translated from foreign languages is mainly handled by two publishing houses, Mir (Peace) and Progress. They do not, however, have a complete monopoly of what is probably the most profitable business in Soviet publishing. The other literary publishing houses mentioned above also publish translations of foreign authors, both classical and contemporary.

The publication of the main ideological works distributed by the Communist Party—the party histories, the works of Lenin and other Soviet leaders, studies in Marxism and Communism, and so forth—is concentrated in the hands of the Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury (State Publishers of Political Literature)—usually known as Gospolitizdat—which probably has the largest output of any Soviet publishing house. There are also publishing houses dealing with works of history, military affairs, science, medicine, and most of the main fields of knowledge. These are all nationwide (i.e. all-union) publishing houses issuing works in the Russian language for distribution throughout the Soviet Union. For this reason editions of books of wide appeal or use frequently run into hundreds of thousands. A history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union published in 1959 had a first edition of one and a half million copies. But a two-volume *Short History of the USSR*, published by the Nauka house in Leningrad for the Soviet Academy of Science and apparently intended for university students, was issued in only 38,000 copies. Other edition figures taken at random from the post-war period are: Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1955), 225,000; Leskov's *Short Stories* (1955), 300,000; Il'f and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf* (1955), 150,000; Kaverin's *An Open Book* (1956), 75,000; Tendryakov's *Selected Works* (1963), 50,000; Pasternak's *Poems* (1966), 100,000.

Apart from the all-union publishers there are republican enterprises issuing works both in Russian and in the language of their republics. More than half (130 out of 227) of the major publishing houses in the Soviet Union are republican enterprises accounting for 30 per cent of the titles issued and 55 per cent of the total number of volumes produced. In recent years efforts have been made to develop the trade in books between the various republics by opening special bookshops in the republican capitals (for example, in the Ukraine, Azerbaidjan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) and holding book fairs in provincial cities. Representatives of book dealers from 10 different republics were said to have attended such fairs in Odessa and Brest in 1968.[2]

In the last decade, however, steps have been taken to reduce the degree of autonomy enjoyed in certain fields by republican and provincial authorities. This development followed the creation in 1963 of a State Committee for Publishing, which is attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR and has the status of an all-union ministry. This body is responsible for supervising the whole of the publishing business throughout the Soviet Union and appears even to control branches of the printing industry.* It controls a nationwide system of 179 publishing houses, which produced 35 per cent of the titles and 73 per cent of the copies printed in 1969.

One of the first acts of the new committee was to carry out, in conjunction with the Committee for Party and State Control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, an investigation into the work of the publishing house known as the Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Yuridicheskoi Literatury (State Law Publishers). The investigators were said to have exposed "serious shortcomings and crude errors" in the publication of works on Soviet law. The publishing house was immediately given a new name—Yuridicheskaya Literatura (Legal Publications)—completely reorganized, and placed under the direct control of the Committee for Publishing. It was allotted priority over every other publishing house in the production of law books. The main reason for this action appears to be that some law publishers in the republics and large cities (notably Leningrad) had been issuing works that discussed questions of Soviet legal procedure in a relatively objective manner and without close adherence to the Marxist-Leninist approach to such matters. It was also argued, however, that "parallelism" in law publishing had resulted in book-stores being cluttered up with unsold law books, with consequent losses to the publishing house. In 1962, of 318 titles of law books produced by the State Law Publishers, 160 lost money.[3]

The responsibilities of the State Committee for Publishing were defined in part as "the planning by subject on a state scale of the output of all forms of literature," and it clearly has considerable power through its control of publishing houses and printing works to determine what may and what may not be published in the Soviet Union. But it is not charged directly with the duty of censorship. This is the function of the body known as Glavlit,* an acronym for the "Chief Administration for the Preservation of Military and State Secrets in the Press," which was first set up in 1921 and whose duties were spelt out in detail in government decrees in 1922 and 1931. Its job is to exert "politico-ideological, military, and economic control over productions of the press, manuscripts, photographs, drawings, and so forth, intended for publication or distribution, as well as over radio broadcasts, lectures, and exhibitions." The 1931 decree set out in detail the considerable powers exerted by the agents of Glavlit, which include the censorship of all material intended for publication, the confiscation of material considered unsuitable, the power to close down publishing houses and to ban the import of material from abroad, and the preparation of lists of information regarded as secret and of publications that are banned.

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* An edition of the selected works of Isaak Babel' published in 1966 was produced by a Leningrad printing works "of the Committee for Publishing attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR."

Representatives of Glavlit, known as "plenipotentiaries," are to be found in the offices of all publishing houses, in the editorial offices of all periodicals, and wherever the printed word is produced. Their power is absolute, and there appears to be no possibility of appeal against their decisions, although an influential editor may sometimes try to "negotiate" with them. For the great majority of writers and people employed in publishing they are unknown, faceless officials. The only evidence of their existence is a five-figure number preceded by a letter, which appears on the final page of every publication: this is the censor's *imprimatur*.

It would, however, be a mistake to think that the agents of Glavlit are mainly occupied with banning and censoring "unsuitable" works submitted for publication. There are so many other forms of control over the printed word that their work consists mainly in advising editors and pointing out relatively minor deviations from what is approved. Writers and editors, themselves indoctrinated and ever conscious of the controls on their activities, tend to censor themselves, and only in rare cases submit for publication works that fly in the face of official policy. If there are writers in the Soviet Union whose ideas do not accord with those of the Communist Party or whose style does not comply with the dictates of Socialist Realism, they either keep their thoughts to themselves or write only, as they say, "for the drawer."

The control over publishing extends naturally to restrictions on the publication of foreign literature in translation. The Soviet Union appears in international statistical reference books as the largest publisher of translations: 4457 in 1958, according to the United Nations *Statistical Yearbook* for 1960. Soviet sources claim that the Soviet Union produces nine times as much translated material as Britain and four times as much as the United States. But these figures give no true idea of the availability to readers in the Soviet Union of works published outside its borders, because the overwhelming majority of the translations are from the languages of non-Russian peoples of the USSR into Russian or the reverse. Thus, of the 7674 titles of books and brochures published in translation in 1969, no less than 5914 were translated from Russian and 14 other languages of the USSR. Only 1760 titles were of books originating outside the Soviet Union; of these 719 were written in English, 220 in German, and 129 in French. More than 300 of the total originated in the countries of eastern Europe subject to communist control. Moreover, the great majority of the 1760 titles were political, scientific, or technical works; only about 700 were concerned with literature and the arts. Even this relatively small number was very carefully selected and filtered through the censorship machinery.

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* See also Ch. 13, "Russian Literature in the Twentieth Century."

There is a certain number of European and American and classical authors whose works are approved by the Soviet authorities and who enjoy considerable popularity with the readers. They include Shakespeare, Dickens, Stevenson, Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Hugo, Stendhal, Mérimée, Balzac, Maupassant, Jules Verne, George Sand, Defoe, Cervantes, Hans Andersen, Goethe, Heine, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Zweig, Anatole France, Jack London, Mark Twain, O. Henry, Dreiser, and a few others. Apart from these classics the Soviet authorities have in recent years permitted the publication of certain works by such contemporary Western writers as A. J. Cronin, J. B. Priestley, Graham Greene (*Our Man in Havana* and other works), Richard Aldington, Alan Sillitoe, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, Howard Fast, Arthur Miller, and J. D. Salinger. They also publish translations of some works by authors whose writings are little known in their own countries but whose political views or the picture they paint of life under capitalism are considered suitable for Soviet citizens to digest.

Until 1973 the Soviet government did not subscribe to any international copyright convention, and did not consider itself under any obligation to recompense the publishers or authors of works issued abroad and translated for Soviet consumption. As far as works of literature were concerned the Soviet practice varied according to the relationship between the Soviet authorities and the author concerned, if he was still living. If he was on good terms with the Soviet authorities and was allowed to visit the Soviet Union, he might be paid a fee for his work, usually in unconvertible roubles, but occasionally in foreign currency. He might also be rewarded in kind with free accommodation and board in Moscow or at a Soviet holiday resort.

But an author who did not entertain such relations with the Soviet authorities had little hope of receiving any payment for the publishing of his work in the Soviet Union, and had no legal claim at all. This applied in particular to the large number of works on scientific and technological subjects published in the West that Soviet publishing houses (with, of course, the approval of the Soviet government) publish in Russia without any reference to publisher or author. These pirated editions are often not placed on sale in bookshops but are distributed only to the specialists in the particular field of knowledge they deal with. This practice also applies to translations of political works published in the West that the Soviet authorities consider unsuitable for general consumption but necessary for the information of a limited number of senior officials. Even in the case of Western political works made available in translation to the general public the authorities are not above censoring passages that they consider to be "undesirable."

In 1973 the Soviet government decided to join the Universal Copyright Convention, set up a special office to deal with copyright matters, and make some changes to Soviet laws affecting authors' rights. At the time of writing (mid-1975) it is not clear to what extent in practice the lot of the foreign author published in the Soviet Union has been improved by this accession to the Convention. The effect on Soviet authors has been to make it obligatory for them to obtain their government's permission before sending a work abroad for publication, and to deal with foreign publishers only through the agency of the Soviet Ministry for Foreign Trade. This would apparently enable the Soviet authorities to take legal action to prevent the publication abroad of works by Soviet writers of which they did not approve (those of Solzhenitsyn being an obvious example), and to claim all royalties accruing from them. No such action has been taken by the Soviet authorities to date, and their reaction to the continued publication abroad of *samizdat* material has not been tested.

III

Despite the highly centralized organization of the Soviet publishing business and the rigid controls over what it may produce, there have occasionally been breaches of the uniformity and evasions of the censor's control. The most significant instances of this took place in the period of political and literary "thaw" between 1956 and 1964—the interregnum between Stalin and the present "collective leadership" that was presided over by Nikita Khrushchev. The prevailing feeling that there were at least some aspects of the Soviet system, particularly those directly associated with Stalin, that were open to criticism encouraged editors, and notably the editors of the principal literary reviews, to be much more liberal in their choice of works for publication and to be bolder in their dealings with the censor. It was at this time that the review *Novy Mir*, under the imaginative and sometimes courageous editorship of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, began to publish works by such authors as Il'ya Erenburg, Victor Nekrasov, Vladimir Dudintsev, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and by such poets as Evtushenko, Voznesensky, and Akhmadulina, which, though mild in their criticisms of the Soviet system by Western standards, were much resented by the Soviet establishment and enjoyed enormous popularity with the reading public. The most powerful of these works was Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), which was published only after many exchanges between Tvardovsky and the authorities, and was the high-water mark of liberalism in Soviet post-war publishing. No subsequent major work of Solzhenitsyn's has been published in the Soviet Union; nor, of course, has Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, first published (in Italy) in 1957.

The severity of the controls forced other writers, some of them much more sharply critical of Soviet Communism, to seek other means of getting into print. Some of them, such as Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, succeeded in sending their manuscripts abroad and concealing their authorship (under the pseudonyms "Abram Tertz" and "Nikolai Arzhak") when they were published in translation. In 1965, however, they were accused of slanderous statements against the Soviet system, were tried, and were sentenced to long terms of hard labour in prison camps. Others circulated their works in *samizdat*. Although the total circulation of *samizdat* material is of necessity small, the number of works —ranging from short essays to substantial works of political research— runs into hundreds and constitutes an important library of underground writing. It is in this form that the *Chronicle of Current Events* appears regularly with information not to be found in the Soviet press.

IV

However much the business of book publishing in the Soviet Union differs from publishing in democratic countries, there is no disputing the fact that the Soviet book industry produces an enormous number of volumes every year—probably more than any other single state—and has been doing so for several decades. What do we know about the technical quality of the product? And what are the problems facing the book-publishing industry in the Soviet Union?

It is not difficult to find answers to these questions, because they are discussed quite frankly in the Soviet press. Commenting on this matter in a Soviet government newspaper in 1968, a writer noted some improvement in the quality of book production, but then said: "It is all the more disappointing that there are still many books, magazines, postcards, and colour reproductions being produced of very poor technical quality. An unattractive binding and badly printed text and illustrations evoke justified dissatisfaction in the readers."[4]

The writer went on to complain of the poor quality of the paper being produced for the book-publishing industry and to reveal that the variety of papers available was getting less each year. In 1960 first-quality printing paper had constituted 54 per cent of the total output of paper; by 1968 the proportion had fallen to 20 per cent. This will not surprise anyone who has regularly to read and handle the products of the Soviet publishing industry. A really well-produced book in an attractive binding and clearly printed with an easy-to-read typeface on good white paper is a rarity. Books intended for sale abroad are usually printed and bound in Hungary or East Germany.

But it is not just a matter of quality: there is an absolute shortage of paper of any kind in the Soviet Union, and this shortage has affected book publishing especially badly since 1967 when restrictions were removed on the number of subscriptions that could be accepted by magazines and other periodicals. From that time the latter took priority in the consumption of printing paper and facilities, and the total number of books produced has remained more or less static. At a special conference called to discuss the situation by the influential *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in September 1969, leading figures in Soviet book publishing complained of the failure of the printing industry to expand fast enough to meet demands on it, of the consequent strain under which printers were working, of the lack of skilled workers and difficulties of recruitment, and of the consequent effects on book production. One effect was that printing works were refusing to accept orders for books of small editions, which meant, according to one speaker, editions of between 30,000 and 50,000. Another effect was that printers were reluctant to accept work on books of small format or with illustrations, because such editions did not work to their advantage under the Soviet system of payment. One speaker said: "The planning authorities approach the printing industry with the same criteria as other branches of industry." Another complained: "You can't plan book production in the same way as you plan the output of aluminium saucepans."[5]

It was made quite clear at this conference that the actual output of works of literature in the Soviet Union was decreasing year by year and that this trend was unlikely to be reversed in the near future. The situation may improve when the new printing plants being built under the last Five-Year Plan (1971–5) are completed. In any case, Soviet publishers are likely to be more concerned with quantity than quality for many years to come.

One important consequence of the large editions in which books appear in the Soviet Union is their relatively low prices. The average price of a novel in hard covers appears to be still about 1 rouble (about 40p); political works are often much cheaper, and even a major four-volume dictionary of the Russian language costs only 13 roubles (about £5.20). A further consequence is that the more successful authors are relatively well paid for their labours. They do not receive royalties on sales, as is the custom in the West, but are paid a lump sum for each edition in accordance with the length of the book and the category for payment into which they are placed. There are now six different categories for authors of prose works of fiction, ranging from 150 to 400 roubles per "author's sheet," which is equal to about 25 typewritten quarto sheets. A novel of 300 pages amounts to some 16 "author's sheets," for which an author of established reputation but not yet a best-seller might expect to receive 300 roubles a "sheet," or 4800 roubles (almost £2000). This is the payment laid down for a first edition, which cannot be less than 15,000 copies. But a publisher will rarely print so small a number of copies at the first printing: he is more likely to print 40,000 or 50,000 right away for reasons of economy, and this will automatically be treated as the printing of a second edition, for which the author will receive the initial fee plus 60 per cent. Subsequent editions, irrespective of the number of copies printed, are paid at a percentage of the first-edition rate, declining from 60 per cent for the second edition to 30 per cent for the sixth and all subsequent editions.[6]

This is a rich return in a country where the average wage for a skilled worker in industry is 122 roubles (about £49) a month and a university professor receives 3600 roubles (about £1450) a year. In fact the rewards are even greater because of the almost invariable practice of first publishing a new work in one of the literary reviews, for which the author will normally receive payment at the first-edition rate—4800 roubles in the example quoted above. The fact that literary work, often of very ordinary quality, is so richly paid explains why many Soviet authors are willing to accept the many restrictions placed on them so long as they can have their works published.

In the Soviet Union, and in other communist countries too, the writer who displays some talent and is willing to comply with the political and other restrictions placed on his activity by the state enjoys many advantages unknown to writers in countries not ruled by Communism. He may be trained as a writer by the state; he is relieved of financial worries early in his career; he enjoys facilities not available to ordinary mortals in the way of shops, clubs, and rest homes. If his loyalty to the regime is unquestioned, he may even be awarded the richest prize of all—a trip to the West. He occupies a very special position in society: he is one of the elite. It is all the more remarkable and instructive that so little of real literary value is produced in the communist world. It is very rarely that a work issued by a Soviet publishing house is found worthy of translation and publication in the West for its literary merits alone. This appears to be a direct result of a system which lays down that a writer's primary duty is not to experiment in the style or content of his writing, to recount new experiences, and to expound new ideas, but to serve the proclaimed objectives of the Soviet state. If he fails to do this he forfeits the state's goodwill and suffers all the sanctions that an omnipotent government can impose. At the congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1971, Leonid Brezhnev, the party's General Secretary, said: "When a literary creator rejects the Soviet way of life, when he helps our ideological enemies in their efforts to defeat Communism, then he deserves only one thing: society's contempt."

"Contempt" in this context means that such a writer is expelled from the Writers' Union: he is forbidden to ply his trade as a writer, and publishing houses will not touch his works. Such was the fate of Alexander Solzhenitsyn before the Soviet Union "assisted" his flight into exile.

V

The publishing business in the communist-ruled countries of Europe (with the important exception of Yugoslavia) is in fundamentally the same position as it is in the Soviet Union: the publishing industry is entirely in the hands of the state. It is extremely unlikely that a book written by an author disapproved of by the Communist Party or containing views sharply critical of communist policy could be published or distributed in any of those countries. But it is fair to add that, doubtless because of these countries' different histories and cultures and their continuing tendency to look to western Europe, the cultural scene is not quite so monolithic as in the Soviet Union. The Hungarian revolt of 1956 had its origins in literary circles in Budapest, just as Czech and Slovak writers played a leading part in the movement for the political reform of Czechoslovak Communism in 1968.

During the first half of 1968, until the Russian intervention, the censorship in Czechoslovakia became practically ineffective and publishers quickly took advantage of the situation to respond directly to the demands of the reading public. The results of this brief taste of freedom in publishing were made apparent in 1970, when the process of "normalizing" the situation was in full swing. Officials then admitted the existence of a list of 80 proscribed authors whose works were considered unsuitable, including Jaroslav Seifert (b. 1910), the Czech poet and former Chairman of the Czech Writers' Union. The list of proscribed and confiscated books runs to 150 titles, including works as diverse as a volume of classical Greek drama, writings of the founder-President of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Masaryk, and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (this latter apparently because it included an epilogue by Josef Skvorecky, an author already proscribed). Many of the banned works had been in preparation at various publishing houses and printers, who were said to have incurred heavy losses as a result of the ban. Karel Bousek, an official of the Czech Ministry of Culture, announced in July 1970 that henceforward only works considered to serve "the interests of the Communist Party and the people" would be published in Czechoslovakia. The decision about which books complied with this criterion lay, of course, with the communist authorities. Bousek added: "Any other literature is not and cannot be anything but political provocation."[7]

Czechoslovakia is now passing through a period of extreme political reaction. Although the principle of state control over the printed word is established in all the countries of eastern Europe, there are some interesting nuances in the manner of its application. By far the most interesting situation exists in Hungary, where creative writers have succeeded in achieving a sort of *modus vivendi* with the regime. On the one hand, the authorities have refrained in the course of the last decade from using the cruder forms of control; on the other hand, the writers, editors, and publishers have tried to avoid the sort of extremes that could provoke official action. There is, for example, no pre-censorship such as operates in Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia, and the Communist Party's views on literary and artistic matters are made known not in the form of resolutions but in "analyses" that are then subject to discussion. The official view on what may or may not be published was summed up in the following terms: "Works that are politically not hostile but that possess humanistic values, yet at the same time are ideologically debatable and are more or less in opposition to Marxism or to Socialist Realism, may appear and be distributed."[8]

The Hungarian authorities are apparently satisfied as long as a writer does not proclaim manifestly anti-socialist ideas and his work is not openly hostile to the regime. The result is that Hungarian authors are able to indulge in stylistic experiments and to discuss and even support non-communist ideas. A similar situation exists in the Hungarian cinema.

Book publishing in Hungary is in difficulties, however, for a different reason. The reforms carried out in recent years on the economic system, which have had the effect of decentralizing the economy and throwing economic enterprises back on their own resources, have caused a crisis in the publishing trade. After many years of protection and state subsidy the industry finds itself unable to be self-sufficient and to carry out the modernization that it needs. The capacity of the existing printing works is hopelessly inadequate and handicapped by obsolete machinery, out-of-date processes, and lack of skilled labour. In publishing the production cycle is now nearly two years.

Until a few years ago Rumanian writers and artists also enjoyed a degree of freedom comparable with that of the Hungarians, with the result that a number of works were published that were discreetly critical of some aspects of Communism or at least avoided the cruder prescriptions of Socialist Realism. In 1971, however, the party leader Nicolae Ceausescu initiated a new "ideological campaign" aimed at imposing stricter discipline on writers and artists. Ceausescu summarized the idea behind his action in these words: "Art must serve a single aim: socialist, communist education. Within this framework we stand for freedom of creation and a broadly imaginative approach, but always in line with our own *Weltanschauung*." In a regime where political controls were already very strict it was clear that the freedom of writers and editors to publish works not approved by the party would diminish considerably.

Although controls over publishing and creative writing in eastern Europe are a little less draconian than they are in the Soviet Union, they are everywhere effective enough to prevent the appearance of any work that the authorities consider "dangerous." Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the cultural scene under Communism is that, despite the power and sanctions wielded by the regime, there are still authors and editors who try to evade the controls and to convey dissident views to the public. It is less remarkable, but none the less important to note, that not one indisputably great work of "proletarian" literature has yet emerged out of the system of state control of the printed word in the communist countries. This does not appear to worry the communist rulers, for whom ideological "purity" is of greater moment than the creative autonomy of the artist.

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6. From an article in *Zhurnalist* 12 (Moscow 1968) by Vasili Kamyshev, head of the legal department of the Committee for Publishing.
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8. From an article in *Tarsadalmi Szelme* [Social Review] 7–8 (Budapest 1966); this journal is the theoretical political monthly of the Hungarian Communist Party.

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As far as I know, no work has been written in the West on the general question of book publishing in the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Specific aspects of the subject, however, notably the operation of censorship and the tensions between writers and the political apparatus, have been dealt with in a number of books. The following are recommended: H. SWAYZE, *The Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946–59* (London 1962), a valuable review of this subject; ROBERT CONQUEST, *The Politics of Ideas in the USSR* (London 1967), containing basic facts on the organization of censorship and the publishing business; LEONID VLADIMIROV, *The Russians* (London 1968), which includes an account of the operation of censorship from the point of view of a practising journalist.

The principal Soviet source of factual information about publishing is *Pechat SSSR* (Publishing in the USSR), issued annually by the Kniga publishing house (Moscow) for the Committee for Publishing. It consists mainly of statistics, but its Introduction usefully summarizes trends in the industry. The Soviet Encyclopaedia (in both small and large versions) contains some of the basic facts. For more detailed information I have had to rely on articles in newspapers, literary journals, and "trade" periodicals, some of which are mentioned in the text.

The study of book publishing in the communist countries of eastern Europe (not to mention China) requires knowledge of all the languages concerned. There are, however, many accounts in English of the role played by writers in the events in Poland and Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

For a detailed analysis of the Soviet attitude to copyright law, see HARRY BLOOM, "The End of *Samizdat*?" in *Index on Censorship* 2 (London 1973), published by Writers' and Scholars' International.

CHAPTER 21

Literature and Science

Anthony Thorlby*

> To create vistas in no way inferior to those which scientists of all categories are discovering every day and which are enabling them to create marvels.[1]

I

That there is a perennial "problem" in the relationship of science to literature, of knowledge to poetry, will have become apparent in the chapters devoted to this subject in the preceding volumes. The 20th century provides a further point of perspective from which to observe several features of the problem, some of them new, some of them old. For instance, it has become clearer that the literary imagination enters into rivalry with its scientific opponent in a far from straightforward sense. Whatever poets may have said about science—and their views were at no time uniformly negative—the value of their poetry obviously cannot be judged by the same criteria as apply to science (despite the use by modern critics of pseudo-scientific vocabulary that describes the way words "function," "operate," and "work"). The poet seeks an artistic quality in words, an imaginative experience, which has a "truth" of its own; and this aspect of poetry cannot be measured squarely against what it says "objectively" about the world. Despite their misleadingly objective techniques of analysis, literary theorists and critics have shown rather how a poem constitutes a reality in its own right: that it not only says something but *is* something. And modern poets too have been increasingly fascinated by the act of saying and the process of poetic diction, rather than by the mirror image of the world, such as art as a whole was formerly considered to present.

Doubtless many factors contribute to that change in Western attitudes toward art, from regarding it as a mirror, to regarding it as a lamp, to cite Professor Abrams' celebrated distinction.[2] The fact that stands out most relevantly in the present context is the coincidence in time of this change in attitude with the growth of the scientific outlook. The fascination of the poet with himself as a producer of poetry, and even (as he has sometimes declared) quite impersonally with the medium itself, may be regarded as an act of self-defence by a man whose right to pronounce on the real world appears to be challenged. How much Romantic and post-Romantic literature is about art, the cultivation of aesthetic experience, and the woes of this way of life! How often has a poet felt driven to justify himself, desperately writing (in Baudelaire's words) "to prove that I am not the lowest of men," or making some more defiant "defence of poetry"! He has been driven by the doubt whether he were merely imagining things about the world that were not true, merely (in Schiller's phrase) "painting pictures on his prison wall." But the drive remains always a drive to write, and new poetry has been inspired even by the recognition that poetry is incompatible with the so-called "real" world.

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*Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Sussex.

In becoming thus self-conscious of its phoenix-like power, poetry has been tempted also to make extravagant claims. Reflection upon the character of consciousness always tends to promote romantic thoughts about the role of spirit in the world. The tendency of all idealist philosophy is to regard consciousness as a greater mystery than reality, and ultimately as identical with it. Once poetry is felt to symbolize the mind at its most self-aware, it can be said "to comprehend all science," and to be that "to which all science must be referred."[3] It is interesting to notice the difference between a rationalist's scepticism about the limits of science in the early 18th century and the claims of a transcendental idealist some 100 years later. Pope merely comments on the small *amount* of the world that science illumines, thus leaving open the possibility that a larger amount could be illumined:

> How little, mark! that portion of the ball,
> Where, faint at best, the beams of science fall.[4]

Emerson, on the other hand, in writing about "The Poet," asserts that "he alone knows anatomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation." The key to this preposterous assertion lies in the last word, which echoes Emerson's belief, expressed in his *Diary*, that "there is a correspondence between the human soul and everything that exists in the world; more properly, everything that is known to man." The qualifying final phrase reveals the crux of the modern poetic defence. "Everything that exists" can "more properly" be understood as "everything that is known to man."

The poet understands most deeply "the infinitude of the private man" and thus has access to the plenitude of existence. Even so unphilosophical a poet as Whitman (whom Emerson was the first to appreciate, it may be recalled) had an immense influence as an inspiringly modern poet partly because his manner of writing seemed to embody this new claim for poetry. "Poet! beware lest your poems are made in the spirit that comes from the study of pictures of things—and not from the spirit that comes from contact with real things themselves." It is difficult to be sure what this new poetry is to be, but it is clearly to be something more than a mere picturing of the world.

Before looking more closely at the ways in which literature has come to terms, in theory and in practice, with science in the modern world, it is worth noting how the essentials of the problem and of a possible solution were stated by the ancient philosophers. Whitman's notion that poetry should not be "made in the spirit that comes from the study of pictures of things" would have been comprehensible to Plato, who would, however, have doubted whether a poet could ever achieve much progress toward "real things themselves." Both Socrates and Plato posed a dilemma of choice between truth and mere imaginative representation. Aristotle, on the other hand, made a more complex distinction between knowledge, action, and a third thing, which might be called "production." All arts are concerned with making something, with *poiesis* (whence the word "poetry" derives). This product is a source of pleasure, and whatever merits it may have in instructing us about reality, it is also an addition to reality. This function of literature seems to be reflected again in the Latin word *auctor* (whence "author"), which the Romans applied not only to writers, but also to generals; the root verb means, apparently, to augment; writers evidently had this in common with generals, that they made gains of territory. We find this conception of art being revived in the 20th century by so distinguished a theorist as José Ortega y Gasset, who quotes in support of it Goethe's observation that "Each new idea is like a newly developed organ."[5] The imagination enables us to do much more than invent more or less fanciful likenesses and ornaments for reality: it enables us to make a new thing altogether, a new "world" of experience. Similarly, Paul Valéry, the modern French poet who has been most concerned with the question of how poetry relates to the scientific intelligence, also resorts to the concept of *accroissement*, of an enlargement of our psychic life, to explain the nature of literary creation.

II

Paul Valéry (1871–1945) may be regarded in many ways as the prototype of the modern intellectual writer, obsessed by the problem of intelligence in its dual aspect of rationality and intuition. His essays and notebooks are filled with reflections on science and the problems that it poses for the imagination of the 20th century. Broadly speaking, these may be described as psychological and technological. He is not concerned with the essentially theological question that a scientific "explanation" of the universe has seemed to involve for so many sensitive souls since at least the time of Lucretius in the 1st century B.C.* This question, which is generally termed that of "reductionism"—making "modern and familiar things that are supernatural and causeless," as Shakespeare makes one such worried intellectual say[6]—has not inspired much significant literature in the modern period. We find some ironical treatments of it, say, in Thomas Mann's famous sanatorium for Western civilization's sick intelligence, where a doctor tells the hero that the human body consists mainly of water, or in Aldous Huxley's reflections on the physiology of music in *Point Counter Point* (1928). Perhaps no imaginative writer can ever take reductive thinking simply at its face value, for as soon as he comes to write any such thoughts into a novel or play or poem he is himself thinking in a quite different manner: he is engaged in an act not of reduction but of production. Valéry is interesting as a writer because of his insight into this difference, the difference made by the irreducible presence of consciousness.

Valéry's way of exercising his creative intelligence is to reflect upon its nature. Thus, the subject of his writing is frequently the medium itself, which other writers customarily take for granted and simply use to write about the world. Valéry was prompted toward this introverted activity because he hoped thereby to overcome the apparent division between a scientific and an imaginative account of reality. He shifted the grounds of discussion away from the crude difference between the real events of science and the fictitious events of literature onto the common—or at least comparable—ground of what occurs in the mind of man as a conscious, thoughtful creature. "I could not bear," he wrote in one of his many reflections upon his own intellectual development, "that the poetic state should be set in opposition to the full and sustained activity of the intellect."[7] The poet is uniquely endowed only inasmuch as he can become conscious of, and make visible by his metaphorical use of language, the difference that human consciousness in general "makes" to the world. "Man thinks, therefore I exist," says the universe (in "Moralités," *Tel quel I*, 1930). Consciousness is utterly dissimilar and consequently irreducible to any of the objects of consciousness—which is to say it cannot be reduced to anything at all. "In order to affirm itself, consciousness must begin by denying an infinity of elements an infinite number of times, and by exhausting the objects which lie within its power without exhausting this power itself . . . it is thus not the same as pure nothingness, however close it may come to it."[8]

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* In fact, the essential features of the question were already well represented in Greek philosophy, if not in Greek literature. Both Socrates and Aristotle, for instance, demonstrate (in different ways) that questions about why things happen as they do, or the universe is as it is, cannot be answered by only one type of "reason."

There is a consistency bordering on monotony in Valéry's reflections upon this theme: how does the near-nothing of the mind's presence in the world relate to the mindless immensity of life, which is, as he says on one occasion, "drunk with absence"? The phrase occurs in the poem "Le cimetière marin," where "absence" acquires the force of a positive image. The dead are said to have melted away into this absence, and a piece of fruit, when it is eaten (i.e. enjoyed consciously), is also said to "melt" and to "change its absence" into a definable human experience, namely, of pleasurable taste. Many complementary images in this and other poems establish the relationship of mind to world in a way that is quite the reverse of the old-fashioned rationalistic view. Instead of the universe appearing as a mechanical structure in which spirit might hopefully try to prove its independence or at least some degree of freedom, Valéry assumes a universe as devoid of any fixity as the sea. The only regularity, continuity, and indeed identity that the universe exhibits is constructed for it by the human mind. This is not to say that there "are" no regularities in nature, but rather that regularity can only be identified, preserved, and in that sense can only "exist" distinctly from the infinite, undifferentiated mass of being as a result of the point of view adopted by the human observer. His point of view depends not just literally on his position in space, but metaphorically on his mental position, and particularly on his consciousness of time, which he is able to span like a roof, building as it were a "temple of time" within his soul. The observer who gazes at the glittering surface of the sea under a mid-day sun will have the illusion of knowing something at rest, immutable as diamond. But the perfection and peace of total, unchanging knowledge, to which all art and science aspire, is attainable only by gods, not by mortals (as Valéry reminds his reader by means of a quotation from Pindar). The points of light that glitter on the sea are a "composition," like a work of art; they symbolize a moment of illumination, the conjunction of light—the oldest symbol of understanding—and sea, the fluid element whose movement resembles that of life, and perhaps literally gave rise to it. For the gods, doubtless, the sun is always high in the heavens, and it is always noon. For man, of course, the moment passes, and if he tries to hold it fast or believes that the image of the sun is really gold he will become a mere idolater.

Valéry uses the word *idol*—which, besides meaning an object of superstitious and too literal reverence, also signifies more generally an image and thus in some sense a false object—in "Le cimetière marin" and also in his essays, most notably in "Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci" (1895). There he defines for the first time the question that was to preoccupy him for the rest of his life: the way in which the mind conceives the world. It is not any particular conception or image that interests him, but the mental mechanism that conceives. "Any thought whatsoever that becomes fixed takes on the character of a hypnosis and becomes, in the language of logic, an idol; in the domain of poetic construction and of art, it becomes an unfruitful monotony."[9] Valéry admits in this essay that he is talking as much about himself as he is about Leonardo da Vinci; the spectre of monotony haunts his own thoughts about thinking, in fact, and drives him on to seek creative satisfaction in ever more difficult acts of dialectical negation. This is what gives to his poetry its characteristic quality of extreme abstractness coupled with extreme sensuousness. He regarded this combination of effects, and indeed the effectiveness of poetry altogether, as a deliberate manipulation by the poet of his readers' sensibilities: "The work of art is thus a machine designed to excite and combine mental experiences of their own."[10] A poem does not erect an idol, a false image of the world, and pretend that it is true; it constructs a new world of thought. And the truth of this thought is measured by its ability to carry the mind beyond itself, beyond the limits of the system of understanding that it has just set up. "At a given point in this self-observation or double life of the mind . . . it is apparent that the series of [our thoughts], the panoply of combinations, contrasts, perceptions forming along a particular line of inquiry, or simply according to some pleasurable drift, is in fact developing in a *perceptibly* regular manner, with the demonstrable continuity of a machine. The idea (or desire) then grows to precipitate this train of thought, to push its term to their *limit*, as far as imaginative expression will go, *beyond which point everything will be changed*."[11]

Valéry's analysis of the mind's efforts to comprehend and transcend itself may appear at first sight to have little relevance to what is usually thought of as science, and the images in his poems nothing at all in common with scientific concepts. Yet there is no doubt that he was deeply impressed as a young man, whose first poems had been in the dreamy symbolist style appropriate for publication in *fin-de-siècle* journals, with the need to reassess the function of poetry. It was, as he later observed, in danger of being relegated by the progress of science and technology to the position of "a home or cottage industry . . . making toys for Christmas."[12] He considered Leonardo da Vinci important not simply because he anticipated modern discoveries and inventions, but primarily because of his "method." There was a continuity in all Leonardo's work, scientific, speculative, and artistic alike, and this unity of conception contained a more valuable secret than any of Leonardo's often fragmentary results. The lesson to be learned is that, for art to be as serious as science, it must not simply depict or refer to scientific matters, but itself work with the same intellectual methods. It can do this only if the essential method of science and the essential method of art are assumed to lie in the construction of patterns of relationship. A scientist demonstrates the existence of these patterns in nature; an artist realizes them in the ornamental materials of his art; an engineer constructs machines that turn them to practical use. The common aim of all mental endeavour is thus to establish fields of experience that are continuous, regular, and clear. In a revealing phrase Valéry declares that for him "the lines of magnetic force [which Faraday had discovered] are to be interpreted as those of readiest comprehension."[13] That is to say, their value as a discovery lies not in their objective reality as "things", but in the way they satisfy certain intellectual conditions. Faraday had imagined a new area of thinking on the basis of electrical observations, just as Leonardo had done on the basis of visual observations.

In objective terms the connection between Leonardo and Faraday is tenuous. It might be truer to say that Valéry is imagining a new way of thinking about science on the basis of his knowledge of the then new developments in submolecular research. Nevertheless, his attempt to interpret the psychological meaning of modern physics points at least to very real questions. He sees that the old-fashioned realism that regards things as being distinct from their behaviour, and objects as separable from events—what might be called the inherited grammar of reality—will have to be revised. "The fundamental notion of an *event* does not appear to have been re-examined . . . whereas in the natural sciences the repeated researches of the past 300 years have given us a new way of seeing."[14] Valéry's inquiry into the scientific mentality also throws light on a paradox that is frequently overlooked in discussions about the degree to which events are causally determined. The *imposition* of a causal pattern on events constitutes a creative achievement of the mind, an experience of continuity that is a kind of freedom. Behind the optimism and sense of progress that have characterized the scientific drive to tie nature down to an even more rigorous and completely deterministic scheme lies the assumption (largely inarticulate) that the mind itself transcends this scheme. There is no analogy in nature for this effort by living stuff to conquer, enslave, and at the same time escape itself. This is because what we mean by "nature" is already the captured thing, and the capturing itself something that exists only by opposition, dialectically, at the limit of comprehensibility. Hence Valéry's poems are not "about" nature, but they nevertheless bring fragments of nature into mentally intense focus from a viewpoint of concentrated abstraction that is designed to make the mind aware of its own unutterable difference.[15]

Valéry was never blind to the daemonic and dangerous underside of the scientific pursuit of clarity. The re-evaluation of truth as a human artefact could lead to the abyss of spiritual nihilism, as Nietzsche had warned a quarter of a century before.[16] Immediately after producing his idealized account of Leonardo, Valéry showed the negative of the same portrait: the features were those of the modern intellectual, in *La soirée avec Monsieur Teste* (1896). And his last, unfinished book worried at another version of the same theme in the guise of a Faust play. Valéry wrote most of the extant scenes at the time of France's defeat in 1940, and critics have pored over his *Cahiers* in search of some connection between those historic events and the fragments of this intellectual, ego-centred drama. Did he intend to conclude it with "a last scene—the world broken by an act of knowledge, as a glass is broken by the harmonic note. The exactitude of a thought causes it to explode." ?[17] Certainly he wanted to represent "European history in the figure of one man. . . . The invention of science and scientific power."[18] This play was to have been a summing-up perhaps of the central theme of his work: "The last word—a Comedy: *The Monster*. 'Why am I a monster? But, *mon cher*, because I reflect. . . .' Reflection, we assume, means the systematic negation of the impressions produced by events and by words."[19] As Valéry's work progresses, it is possible to trace a growing pessimism with regard to the tendency shown by the mind to "precipitate a train of thought and push its terms to their limit"—an impulse that he had idealized at the time of the Leonardo essay. It had inspired his own distinctive poetic style, but he also realized that it was a potentially dangerous compulsion. "There is no opinion, no argument, no feeling that, when it is taken to its extreme or carried out systematically, will not lead to the destruction of man."[20] Similarly, Valéry's early discovery of "continuity" as a human artefact began to haunt his imagination from the time of World War I as signifying also the danger of *dis*continuity. Various essays dwell on the thought that the 20th century is unprecedented in the quality of its technologized (as opposed to merely political) history: and this, of course, raises doubts concerning the validity of all conventional forms of art and morality. Valéry's idealization of the lucid, analytical intelligence—"the irrational abyss is an inspiration only to build a bridge," he remarked in connection with Leonardo—changed to a more sombre assessment of the mind's role. "If those who believe in 'spirit' had a more exact idea of the mind, they would be very much afraid of this fire which burns to the gates of Hell—and may even be hellfire itself . . . for, accurately speaking, mind is disorder in action [*désordre en acte*] and the power itself of transformation."[21]

Mon Faust (*c.* 1944) makes a slightly disappointing end to Valéry's career as a writer and a still more inconclusive ending to his meditations on the psychology of knowledge. Part of this failure is due to his too exclusive interest in the subjective character of knowing (this being its chief point of contact with artistic creation), and part is due to the damage done to conventional forms of literary representation by the nature of this subject. For instance, he does not feel able to treat the Faust motif, which might be considered the archetypal story of the doomed scientist, altogether seriously. The old conception of a soul sold for physical pleasure could scarcely any longer explain the modern spiritual dilemma. Is there a definite entity, a soul, left to sell? Does it have a "price"—that is to say, is its value fixed by some scale outside itself? Admittedly, Valéry is still obsessed by the notion that there is an essential self to be lost or found; but the space within which he conceives this drama is too airless and empty of other reality than mental projections. The evil that he senses in the alternation between Faustian dissatisfaction and a Faustian desire for life remains rather abstract and unconvincing. He knows that the relationship of mind to world has become critical, but his definitions of the problems in terms of an ideal unity to be regained, a positive oneness with life beyond all the negations made by the intellect, scarcely move us to feel what the matter really is and why it is urgent. We must turn to other writers for a fuller picture of the conflict between the meaning of knowledge in theory and its meaning in practice, between its fascination for the mind and its perils for the person—indeed, for that community of persons which is human society. Valéry has brought us to the point where we can understand that the pursuit of abstract knowledge in some ways negates not only the world but the subjective self, which European tradition has identified with the moral person, the person that lives and loves.

III

How different in this respect is Thomas Mann's treatment of the same legend, during almost the same years, and for a quite similar purpose: namely, to explore once again the question, which had inspired so much of his work, of the moral psychology of knowledge. He too was concerned primarily with the form of knowing peculiar to art, but like Valéry he was greatly interested in the sciences, about which he was remarkably well informed. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that what information he did possess—or collect for a particular novel or chapter of a novel—he knew how to exploit to artistic advantage. Here he was helped by the fact that he was a novelist rather than a poet. Valéry could not use any of the actual knowledge he possessed, and whose bulk fills his immense *Cahiers*, when he came to compose his poems; for all his interest in scientific method, we can infer its influence on him only from the symbolist technique of his poetry. Thomas Mann (1875–1955) writes explicitly about science, reporting what he has found out, and including the bulk of his ideas on the subject in his novels. Even the protagonists of *Mon Faust*, of whom Valéry stated that they represented his own divided psyche, may symbolize, but scarcely simulate, any actual situation in the world. The protagonists of *Der Zauberberg* (1924; The Magic Mountain) or *Doktor Faustus* (1947) represent no less a division in Mann's mind, but they also simulate in very recognizable detail the social and political circumstances within which the modern intellectual crisis has occurred. Mann is the only writer to have pointed to a profound psychological connection between science and totalitarian terror.

The basis upon which this connection is established, and indeed Mann's model of mental activity generally, is once again derived from artistic and creative experience. He is not concerned with the objective truth of knowledge so much as with its psychological motivation and effect. What is the state of mind induced by scientific knowledge and perhaps inspiring the search for it? The answer is that it is likely to be a sick one. The aspect of science that most impresses the hero in each of these important novels is the distortion of their customary sense of what is normal and natural; above all, it is their aesthetic feeling for form, size, and proportion that science distorts. This bending of perception out of any recognizable shape should not be confused with the traditional philosophical aspirations to look beyond appearance to some spiritually more significant reality. The reality disclosed by astrophysics or microbiology involves perspectives that confound all notions of human significance: mathematical magnitudes and relationships that are only mental constructs—calculable, but not otherwise experienceable. What lies beneath the surface of existence is, scientifically speaking, not spiritual sublimity but deep-sea monsters and cellular geometry. Again, it should be stressed that Mann is not employing that other traditional philosophic device of reductionism, which merely looks to a lower instead of a higher "reality" for its explanation of phenomena. Both varieties of realism imply a *definite* scale of relationships between what is more or less true, more or less real; whereas Mann wants to convey the sensation of discovering that all such scales are arbitrary, that they can be inverted, invented, and ironically interrelated. This discovery is not in itself a scientific one, in the sense of being objectively given by the "nature" of things: by definition, nothing is accepted as given except the possibility of looking at the world from an infinite number of viewpoints. The discovery, then, is an imaginative one, the discovery of a creative possibility. From it stem Mann's famous stylistic and intellectual ironies: his running together of lyrical and technical vocabulary, his inversions—for instance, of the order of creation to describe higher organisms as sick and "fallen" versions of lower organisms—and his many other brilliant parodies.

It is through exploring the possibilities and problems of a parodistic style of writing that Thomas Mann forges a link between science and political extremism, and indeed brings together under a single psychological explanation very many features of modern Europe's social and intellectual life. What the parodist lacks is the spontaneous belief that there is one right and necessary way of expressing the world; he finds that the "effect" of truth can be manipulated, mimicked. Parody may seem to be funny, to release the mind into gay nonchalance, but it effectively undoes any serious sense of commitment. And the soul's desire for a truly binding, authentic form of expression—and experience—remains, as all man's deepest desires remain, unchanged. Mann lays particular stress on the dialectical nature of this situation. The dislocation of the mind from any sense of necessary relationship to the world increases its own freedom of operation, the scope of its detached inquiry; but it also increases the intensity of unattached feeling: desire, too, grows daemonic—that is, out of any human shape, incapable of love. Art, then, no less than science will be capable of unprecedented *tours de force*, but the human consequences are to be feared, both for the individual and for society. If many modern intellectual feats are unprecedented, so also are the primitive forces encountered at the opposite pole from mind. The modern "crisis" lies in the tension between ever-widening extremes, in the sense that—in words from another poet, which have been quoted more frequently than any other to express this century's distress—"the centre cannot hold."[22] Mann's psychological model enables him to see a dangerous pattern running through politics and science, art and philosophy, and to interpret two world wars as its outcome. Totalitarian politics represents both the loss of an order whose centre and scale of values rested on the individual, and also the frenzied search for a more binding supra-personal order. Such politics is dialectically compounded of disillusion and passion, and is therefore always liable to break apart into extremes of cynicism and violence. The impersonal curiosity of science, and the man-dwarfing forces it has let loose, show a similar loss of felt relationship between the mind and its object, a similar disintegration of the recognizable world of individual experience into dimensions past human imagining: similar, but not, however, the same. Thomas Mann's parodistical manner shows a fine awareness of the doubtful truthfulness of such parallels, which are themselves merely constructions that art puts upon reality.

IV

In general, we may say that exploration of the psychological problems posed by science has attracted greater minds and inspired more interesting books than exploration of its technological implications. Valéry was surely right when he remarked of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells that their science adventure stories showed an "elementary imagination," and although science fiction has since become more sophisticated and ingenious, from a literary point of view this judgment is still widely valid. The literary problem here resembles that posed by pornography: sensational settings and graphic details do not in themselves make the old human routine much more interesting. A technological phantasy becomes a good story only if it provides a new perspective, a new model, a symbol for the human situation. Science fiction differs from the old-fashioned fables, which looked at human behaviour through animal, fairy, or other magical eyes, chiefly in placing more importance on the literal truth of their inventions than on the moral truth of their perceptions—a mistake not made by Swift, for instance, in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) or by C. S. Lewis in *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938). Stories that set out in a direction where the human situation is supposed to be not just imaginatively but "scientifically" changed are forced round full circle to the most banal and unimaginative behaviour or outcome in order not to lose touch with the ordinary reader in his (as he thinks) normal world. The writer who would seriously come to grips with what science can do must show, in Auden's words, how "we are changed by what we change,"[23] and this means establishing a norm that will make the extent of this change apparent. Thus, in the novels that have conveyed more vividly the dangers of what technology could do to society, notably Evgeni Zamyatin's *We* (1920), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949), there is in each case a hero who represents the natural, and by implication perennial, character of a human being. Huxley's Savage, for instance, reassuringly tells us: "I want God. I want poetry." More obviously, Huxley and Orwell write in a conventional style that makes it easy to recognize how monstrous their technologized societies are: "double think" is not made to appear much different from older ways of deceit, even though it has more gadgets at its disposal. Zamyatin's novel is no more interesting in its reasoned arguments to prove the wrongness of a totally rationalized order of society, but it does contain some stylistic experiments that show a more imaginative and more positive response to the meaning of science.

Evgeni Zamyatin (1884–1939) explains his views on the matter in a number of essays. He writes, for instance, in words that echo those of Valéry and Nietzsche, that "all truths are erroneous. This is the very essence of the dialectical process: today's truths become errors tomorrow; there is no final number."[24] What Zamyatin asserts with regard to the "dialectical process" is certainly true of the creative process once it comes to reflect upon itself: it derives no satisfaction from truths ready made, it must create them ever anew, and in a sense therefore negates those of the past. Looked at from this self-conscious point of view it appears that "errors are more valuable than truths: truth is of the machine, error is alive." Now, to Zamyatin and other artists and intellectuals of his generation—the generation whose world-views Thomas Mann parodied but never entirely embraced—it seemed that modern science supported this creative attitude toward truth. The name of Einstein was invoked to justify relating bits of space and time in the most arbitrary ways. The abandonment of realism in literature and art was interpreted as reflecting what was popularly thought of as the breakdown of the deterministic scheme of classical physics. "Today, when exact science has exploded the very reality of matter, realism has no roots," Zamyatin writes, and goes on to refer to Einstein and Marx in the same breath as a dozen modern artists (including himself): "The recording of daily life is arithmetic . . . we need integrals from 0 to ∞, we need relativism; we need daring dialectics, we must 'contemplate every accomplished form in its movement, that is, as something transient' (Marx). Daily life can enter the new prose only in synthetic images, or only in the form of a screen for some philosophic synthesis."[25] This criterion of creativity inspired Zamyatin's criticism in *We* of a finally "accomplished" form of government, founded on "scientific" principles of order and control. It is not a criticism that explains very much about either science or government. Doubtless there is a danger in a technologized society of (again in Auden's words) "the measurable taking charge of him who measures," but the only way in which Zamyatin can conceive of such spiritual corruption taking place is as a result of an operation on the brain. Doubtless, too, many besides Zamyatin were misled into believing that after the revolution society would never harden into any permanent forms (let alone tyrannical ones!) again. Unfortunately, however, Zamyatin's creative principle had no practical relevance to political life in the Soviet Union, but resembled rather such unacceptable doctrines as anarchism or perpetual revolution. The newly accomplished form of Soviet government did not intend to regard itself as transient or to allow its plans for the technical advancement of Russia to be fantastically symbolized as leading to a state of "entropy"; *We* remained unpublished in the Soviet Union and Zamyatin went finally into exile in Paris, the traditional place for experiments in creative living. If his fears for the future of the individual spirit have appeared justified by the surface appearance of Soviet life, the "scientific" explanation that he put forward is not very illuminating.

Zamyatin defined the style necessary for the future as "synthetism," and in one essay on the subject he illustrates its new way of looking at things by an analogy that is scientifically banal but imaginatively of great importance.

> Here is a little piece of skin under the cruel irony of the microscope: ditches, pits, furrows; thick stems of unknown plants. . . . Yet it is your hand. And who will say that the "real" one is this hand, familiar, smooth, visible to all the doubting Thomases, and not the other one—the fantastic plain on Mars? . . . Synthetism has approached

> the world with a complex assortment of lenses, and grotesque, strange multitudes of worlds are being revealed to it.[26]

Zamyatin seems not to have associated *this* loss—of a norm, by which alone reality can be "truly" identified—with his fears for society, as Thomas Mann did. Nor does he meditate as profoundly as Valéry on the changed function of art in view of our more "scientific" awareness of the world: "The purpose of art, including literature, is not to reflect life but to organize it, to *construct* it. (For the task of reflecting life there is a minor art—photography.)"[27] Yet Zamyatin's rather simple-minded little example illustrates one of the main psychological connections between the modern style of art and science. Essentially the same point is made, for instance, by his contemporary in Germany, Gottfried Benn (1886–1956), who was a trained and practising doctor (Zamyatin had studied to be an engineer) and likewise experimented with technical vocabulary and algebraic-looking phrases in his writing:

> What modern physics calls . . . reality is an *x* that becomes ever more enigmatic the more closely one approaches it methodically. Ever more clearly two realms confront each other: the world of expression, the summa of all the concepts that have been worked out in generations of intellectual labour, and then this background which once upon a time was substance, later was Descartes' *ens realissimum*, and today is what they call "ultimate reality."[28]

Benn likewise concludes that "we must acknowledge . . . the world as a spiritual construction, as a transcendental apperception, existence as an intellectual edifice, the act of being as a dream of form." Being well schooled in Nietzschean terminology, Benn acknowledged the nihilistic implications of this view of man—and also acknowledged them as grounds for accepting the promise (if not the practice) of Nazi politics that were to purge the old constructions and inspire a new "anthropological redemption by form."[29] He came to prefer the word "pessimism" to "nihilism," but under either name his position is clear: the power to create the world as "a spiritual construction" is achieved at the cost of regarding all other forms of truth as relative, and reality as inaccessible. "Style," he concludes, "is superior to truth."[30]

If we now turn again to the nagging question that has been with us from the start as to the relationship of these imaginative responses to what scientists actually do, we must be clear about what kind of common ground there is between them. We have called it "psychological," but this is not the same thing as saying that it is "merely subjective" or "not real." "Psychological" is a preferable word because it is not loaded with any particular value judgment—for instance, that weighty value that Plato attached to the idea of an ultimate Reality by which all lesser sorts of truth would be judged—but we might equally have called it "moral." For let us assume that literature presents us with a "construction," as these writers have asserted—"an algebraic formula,/An abstract model of events."[31] Before we can say whether or not such a construction is "true," it is necessary that "each life must itself decide,/To what and how it be applied." The introspective study of the way their own creative minds and media work, which has provided so many modern writers and artists with a model applicable to a wide variety of events, does not have to be well informed about scientific matters, or even to refer to them, in order to reflect problems that scientists too may experience. Kafka, for instance, was not interested in scientific method as Valéry was, and yet the symbolism of his greatest novel can be applied to the work of a scientist in his laboratory:

> In labs the puzzled KAFKAS meet
> The inexplicable defeat:
> The odd behaviour of the law,
> The facts that suddenly withdraw,
> The path that twists away from the
> Near-distant CASTLE they can see,
> The Truth where they will be denied
> Permission ever to reside.[32]

The question, then, that literature teaches us to ask is not: what is the world like, or will it become, according to science? but rather: what is the scientific mind like? To this question there may seem to be as many answers as there are scientists, but precisely on this more personal ground—which scientists tend to dismiss as not relevant or accessible to exact inquiry—literature enables us to recognize patterns and laws of human character, experience, and destiny that lie beneath what shows on the surface.

V

One modern literary technique that may be considered in this context—i.e. because it reflects not any specifically scientific explanations or methods but rather a state of mind that the vastly accelerated pace of technological change readily induces—is what has been called "simultanism." The word is often intended to express something similar to Zamyatin's "synthetism," but perhaps "totalism" might be a more appropriate expression, because what is involved is a new feeling of totality. Doubtless the increased speed of modern communications, the foreseeable spread of a single mode of industrial production, even wars that become global, contributed to this state of mind quite as much as echoed notions of a space-time continuum or the relatedness of energy and mass. In France, the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859–1941) is also thought to have been "influential" in this context, although his influence was essentially reactionary as regards the prevailing reign of *scientisme*. What he did was to provide a subjective mystique that turned to advantage, and as it were "converted" to spiritual use, the confusion and depersonalization of conventional norms by science. To speak of Bergson's influence in this matter is perhaps not quite the *mot juste*, because not all poets interested in apparently Bergsonian ideas had read him, and what even his supposed disciples write mostly produces a literary effect different from his own work. Again, the word "typical" may give better grounds for invoking his name: he provides a more general model for understanding this phenomenon of totalism. Now, to understand his system, we must remember that Bergson regarded himself as an opponent of the scientific method, which he saw as fragmenting reality into discontinuous parts, the most damaging rupture being that between the mind and its object, spirit and matter. His imaginative conception of the problem remains dominated by his opponent—that is, by science: his desire to transcend the scientific problem takes off from an imagined scientific base. What does a concept such as the "organic wholeness" of experience mean? It means the *opposite* of a rational sorting-out of experience into fixed parts and relationships. What does "duration" mean? It means the *opposite* of time as a means of separation and measurement. What does "creative evolution" mean? It means that all exact statements and explanations become the opposite of what was intended, the falling back of an essentially creative process of life into a seemingly solid state of material fixity. The meaning of all Bergson's basic concepts is arrived at dialectically in this way; they induce an intuitive sense of the universe as a totality by negating all partial reductions of it to order. "Mechanism," he observed, "invokes mysticism." If we bear this Bergsonian scheme—or rather, "anti-scheme"—in mind we shall be able to observe the hidden pressure exerted by science on one of the most familiar styles of modern literature, indeed of modern art altogether: its non-realistic experimentation.

The simplest way of visualizing what the modern style attempts is to look at the first complete break with realism, which the cubist painters achieved. Picasso's most literary apologist was Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), who saw the artist as "wishing to provide a total representation of an object." To do this he could not simply look at it "as people standing in the foreground of the picture would see it," but had to confront the spectator with a "complete enumeration of all the elements that constitute the object" and make him see them "simultaneously."[33] Simultanism, then, expresses a vision of the world in which an infinite number of perspectives are possible but none is the real one. But *nota bene*: these two ideas have to be expressed together; they can be expressed at all, in fact, only in opposition to one another. For any act of expression begins to affirm a line of vision. The writer (or painter) must therefore break it off short, initiate another line, crossing the first in a different plane. And he must do this precisely *without* establishing a realistic, temporal, logical, or any other normative relationship between them. Even a stated comparison or similitude implies at once a human point of reference, a mind that has taken up a position from which to compare. It is this positioned mind, the personal subject on whom a sense of objective reality depends, that many modern poets and artists have withdrawn from their work. The self-styled "Simultanists," Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars (who likewise saw in the work of a cubist painter, Delaunay, a technique akin to his own), did not invent this artistic device. Mallarmé began to discover it when he tried to eliminate the word *comme* from his poetic vocabulary; and Rimbaud surely excelled him in those passages in his work where images succeed one another with hallucinatory violence. What Cendrars and Apollinaire chiefly add to this technique—without thereby becoming better poets—are a few glimpses of aeroplanes and trains, radio-telegraphy, and the Eiffel Tower. It is not these occasional details, however, that make their poetry a reflection of a scientific age, but rather their deliberately confused perspective. Their modernistic poems intuit a togetherness of things in time and space that lack a human centre: and yet, of course, these poems are arbitrarily constructed in this way by an all-presiding "I"—an "I" that is "drunk from drinking all the universe" (*ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers*). This conjunction of intellectual construction and spiritual confusion is advertised by the titles of Apollinaire's two main collections of verse: *Alcools* (1913) and *Calligrammes* (1918). Together they sound like the Devil's formula in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* for the discovery of a new source of inspiration in art—at the cost, however, as that novel still asserts (albeit ironically and against itself), of man's individual soul.

There can be no doubt that the formula works, for it has produced an orgy of near-psychedelic visions throughout the arts of modern Europe. Their relationship to science is certainly imaginative rather than exact. No scientist gives up believing that there is one right, necessary, and final account of phenomena to be reached at the end of the road. What the artist has responded to in science is its apparent freedom of experiment, of point of view, and the fact that "the path . . . twists away from the near-distant" goal—that truth where the actual individual will always "be denied permission . . . to reside." This artistic response should not be dismissed as a mere reaction *against* science, therefore, let alone as an escapist attitude (as, for instance, sentimental pantheism was a reaction against the mechanistic world-view of 18th-century science). Modern poets have been exploiting, rather than running away from, the psychological situation into which they have felt that science has led mankind. Consider, for instance, Rilke's mystical attitude toward nature and "things" (a word that has special connotations in his poetry). It is very far from pantheism in the traditional sense, because the mystery is no longer regarded simply as a source of life-giving power in nature, but is discovered in the relationship between the mind and the world, in the ever-shifting, nowhere-fixed perception of the poet who himself creates new constellations of things. This creative possibility was revealed to him during the time he worked with Rodin. Gazing at the latter's sculpture, it seemed to him that: "A hand resting on the shoulder or thigh of another person no longer belongs to the body from which it came; a new thing comes into being through this contact between a hand and what it touches, a thing that has no name and no longer belongs to any body. It is this new thing with its own new boundaries that is now the subject-matter."[34] Again and again in his poems Rilke tries to create new things of this kind, like a ball being thrown between hands ("Der Ball"), which is not seen as a definite object, possessed by one person, nor can it be possessed in itself, but is a centre of movement about which the world of the catchers is constantly being rearranged. Rilke was particularly pleased with this poem, in which he believed he had most successfully transcended all subjectivity of thought and feeling, i.e. any personal centre of vision. Its symbolism reflects the realm in which many catchers of new aesthetic sensations have moved, and their "imitation" (if it is one) of the way science catches particles of nature is probably as true an imitation of the real thing as art ever manages to produce.

Artistic excitement at catching new "truths" by displacing the personal norm—i.e. discarding the measure based on what individuals in a small society once considered right—still permitted many variations in personal style. Space allows us merely to remark in passing that modernism appears to have been less strident, less extreme, less out of key with traditional forms of poetry in Spain than elsewhere. Was this because the Spanish traditions had always accepted the irrational dimensions of death and dream as the "norm" that jeopardizes man's proud consciousness of individual selfhood? Or was it because Spain had so little contact, intellectual or social, with that peculiarly *man-made* rupture in the scale of things that science, technology, and industrialized cities have borne in upon the imagination of English, French, and German poets? A whole generation of Spanish poets appears to have responded in some degree to the general change in European poetic style, even approaching the verges of Surrealism. But in the poetry, for instance, of Antonio Machado (1875–1939), who had heard Bergson lecture in Paris, the focus remains humanistically undistorted, despite all his doubts about the truth of his poetic vision:

Ayer soñé que veía
a Dios y que a Dios hablaba;
y soñé que Dios me oía. . . .
Después soñé que soñaba.[35]

(Yesterday I dreamed that I saw God and that I was talking with him; and I dreamed that God heard me. . . . Then I dreamed that I was dreaming.)

Machado may not have believed in God, but he still used him as a point of reference that "fixes" even the relativity of man's perceptions in time. Even in his melancholy uncertainty, Machado never loses rational control of his ignorance, but grasps it in his marvellous aphorisms:

En mi soledad
he visto costas muy claras,
que no son verdad.[36]

(In my solitude I have seen very clear things that are not true.)

And again:

Se miente más de la cuenta
por falta de fantasía:
también la verdad se inventa.[37]

(One lies more by any account as a result of lack of imagination: truth is also invented.)

A similar kind of personal focus controls even the most visionary poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez (b. 1881). Critics have compared his ideal of *poesía desnuda* with Valéry's search for *poésie pure*, but surely there is a difference. An element of realism remains in Jiménez, a sense of community with the world, that is absent from Valéry. The difference might be pinpointed by a comparison of the tree symbolism in Valéry's "Au platane" and Jiménez' "Del fondo de la vida." Poet and tree do not exist in the same world for Valéry; for him, the tree is only a symbol, or it is nothing. For Jiménez, both stand beneath a common sun:

> un sol, un igual sol, sobre dos sueños.
>
> (a sun, an equal sun, above two dreams.)

Valéry's poem ends on a note of rejection: no meaning inheres in the real, which is only a cipher of the mind. Jiménez concludes:

> Déjanos a los dos que nos miremos.
>
> (Let the two of us gaze at each other.)

Only in exile, in New York, do we find a beginning of disintegration in this Spanish poet's sense of reality.[38] Indeed, it was there too that Federico Garcia Lorca (1899–1936) produced his famous (and rather untypical) experiment with surrealistic imagery in the collection *Poeta en Nueva York* (published 1940). But even then it is not Surrealism *pur sang*; Lorca is guiding much of it polemically, to pass judgment on the rootless perversity of that city, symbol of the way civilization distorts the image of man and his relationship to nature. None of the poems is more furious than the "Oda a Walt Whitman," because Lorca cannot forgive Whitman for his dreamy idealization of mankind's (and particularly America's) conquest of the natural world. The virility of Whitman's dream strikes Lorca as perverse phantasy, unnatural, and thus homosexual; and it is utterly compromised by the sordid facts, "the mountains of coal, advertisements, and railways" among which he dreamed, and the depraved creatures who "point with stained fingers to the edge of your dream while the friend eats your apple tasting faintly of petrol":

> También ese! También! Dedos teñidos
> apuntan a la orilla de tu sueño
> cuando el amigo come tu manzana
> con un leve sabor de gasolina . . . .

One conclusion, then, is obvious: a scientific "world" means one thing in theory and another in practice. Lorca is right: when Whitman declaims

> This earth all spann'd with iron rails, with lines of steamships
> threading every sea
> Our own rondure, the current globe I bring,[39]

he is *dreaming*, as much as any lover, lunatic, or poet ever did. What he is bringing is the vision, rather than the fact; his ideal is a poetic construction. The actual constructions of modern technology may strike us very differently. Thus, too, although Valéry idealized the constructive power of the mind, he had never a good word to say for the actual reconstruction of the earth by scientific techniques. "Man is a stranger in this new situation, this order which he nevertheless has made with his own hands and which is the result of his researches, his calculations, his inflexible will to knowledge and power." He spoke these words in a speech commemorating the Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren (1855–1916), who had striven to reconcile his faith in the scientific future of mankind with the awful realities of a modern, industrialized city—and had suffered a serious mental breakdown in the process. Rilke, who had permitted himself the most advanced spiritual freedom from any conventional norms, was nevertheless opposed to any manifestations of progress, and goes out of his way in his *Sonette an Orpheus* (1922)[40] to warn the young against speed and aeroplanes. Thomas Mann's way of showing that there is a link between an attitude of emancipated aestheticism in private life and disastrous developments in society does not, of course, mean that one causes the other. And yet the search for a superhuman, or at least supra-individualistic, order can often appear irresponsible; not only in blatant instances, such as the Futurist Marinetti's worship of a new Muse in the shape of a

> Dieu véhément d'une race d'acier
> Automobile ivre d'espace[41]
>
> (Violent God of a race of steel, motor-car drunk with space)

or in Gabriele D'Annunzio's poems in praise of speed, power, and violence.[42] History has made us aware, more clearly than any writer could, to what kind of political outcome Ernst Jünger's imaginative vision will lead (although he may not personally have wished it to lead there). He called it "total mobilization" and he meant by it, doubtless, a most aesthetically satisfying picture of mankind achieving as a whole the efficiency, strength, and precision of a machine.[43] Jünger's new man is "the" worker, in the sense of a man who counts not for any subjective personality he may have, but for the part he plays in the production process—or indeed, in the destruction process, in war, where Jünger first experienced this sensation of being caught up by a force greater than himself, greater than any self. A similarly faceless being, de-individualized to express the more than life-size features of mass industrial society, moves through much German expressionist writing, in plays such as Georg Kaiser's *Gas* (1918) and poems such as J. R. Becher's "Mensch steh auf" (Man Arise). In France, Jules Romains developed a theory of what he called *la vie unanime* (unanimous living), based upon a belief in "multiple beings who will carry the evolution of life beyond and above man"—and by man he meant the merely subjective individual to whom even the greatest writers of the past had "restricted" themselves.[44] In the Soviet Union, all manner of "futuristic"—partly mystical, partly aesthetic—modes of poetic imagination attached themselves enthusiastically to the revolutionary cause, which symbolized a release from the limitations and restraints that had lain for centuries on the individual in society. As we have seen elsewhere, however, their aesthetic experimentation was soon restricted again, as they were recalled to write about the more banal tasks of collective citizenship.

VI

The difference between the theory and the practice of science, between its fascination for the mind and its perils for the person, is summed up in Bertolt Brecht's play *Das Leben des Galilei* (1943); it also brings together the twin questions of scientific psychology and scientific technology, whose relationship our civilization still understands badly and controls worse. One theme of the drama is the liberating effect of science; it liberates by its questioning spirit rather than by the answers it gives. It is not dogmatic; it breaks the despotism—and the slavish security—of those who live by dogma. The crux of the play is Galileo's recantation: does his personal action make any difference to the truth of his discoveries? From the point of view of science it apparently does not. All the world (and Brecht's audience) knows that Galileo was right. Brecht (1898–1956) even shows how Galileo went on working in secret and allowed his results to be smuggled out of Italy. Truth triumphant, then—the irresistible and necessary truth of science that cannot be affected by merely human choice? The world of science has no need of heroes: "New science: new ethics." Galileo agrees ironically with his young disciple that this "sounds realistic—sounds like me." After all, had he not once argued that it was not he personally that was to triumph in the end: "it" would triumph. So too he excuses himself in one of the most brilliant rejoinders of the modern theatre. It is not his fault that he has not been a hero: "No. Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes." The fault lies in the time and place; history and the progress of science will one day correct all that. Brecht therefore agreed, in his notes on the play, with Walter Benjamin's Marxist observation that the true hero of the play is not Galileo, the man, but "the people"—the larger totality of mankind that will collectively escape from the weakness of individuals and live by the law of *common* sense. In order to celebrate this larger vision, Brecht arranged the play into 15 scenes that are not meant to hang together in the form of a conventional plot, i.e. to focus attention on Galileo as a tragic hero. And he devised a technique of acting and production that is further meant to prevent the audience from participating "subjectively" in the play, whose problem they are to comprehend rationally, "scientifically." But there is, of course, another theme, as Brecht's audiences very well know, as Brecht himself knew, and evidently Galileo also:

> If scientists, intimidated by self-seeking people in power, are content to amass knowledge for the sake of knowledge, then science can become crippled, and your new machines will represent nothing but new means of oppression. With time you may discover all that is to be discovered, and your progress will only be a progression away from mankind. The gulf between you and them can one day become so great that your cry of jubilation over some new achievement may be answered by a universal cry of horror.

In his notes on the play Brecht stresses the obvious: he is talking about the atom bomb and he makes it clear that his judgment of the case is the same as Galileo's: "The atom bomb is, both as a technical and as a social phenomenon, the classical end-product of his contribution to science and his failure to society."

Brecht's two themes do not join harmoniously, nor perhaps are they intended to. How are we supposed to understand the idea that the atom bomb is the "classical end-product" of Galileo's action? In a classical drama the hero *is* shown to be responsible for his deeds: he is tied to them by the plot (even though the knot may not be solely of his tying). And Galileo does blame himself as though after all he were a guilty and tragic figure: "I, as a scientist, had a unique opportunity. . . . And I surrendered my knowledge to those in power, to use, or to misuse, just as suited their purposes." The question, however, is this: *was* Galileo in a unique position? Would it have made any difference *to science* if he had martyred himself for truth, as Giordano Bruno had done 10 years before? (This event is referred to repeatedly from quite early in the play, thus casting further shadows of doubt on its "message"; Giordano's martyrdom had made *nò* difference.) Brecht's arrangement of the play, with a copy of Galileo's *Discorsi* being smuggled across the border at the end by his young disciple, is quite ambiguous—or disconnected. It constitutes neither a tragic nor an optimistic ending, but merely a later development in time. Here is a scientist of the next generation, who has got over his hankering for heroes. The displacement of the heroic individual from the centre of the stage becomes a dramatic symbol of science's first great discovery: the displacement of the earth from the centre of the universe. Galileo admits that: "There is no scientific work which only one man can write"; and his disciple concludes: "Human weaknesses are no concern of science."

In the speech (quoted above) that Brecht added after the atom bomb had been dropped, Galileo expresses the complementary, not to say contrary, view that natural scientists should have devised "something like the Hippocratic oath of the doctors, the vow to devote their knowledge wholly to the benefit of mankind." It is difficult to believe that Brecht had bothered to read the text of the Hippocratic oath, or indeed given much serious thought to devising "something like" it for the natural sciences. This is not to say that the speech is a failure from a literary standpoint; the rueful reflections of a broken man have an undeniably tragic pathos. But precisely this literary effectiveness, being of a conventional, old-fashioned kind, conflicts with Brecht's more modern message and technique. As a message, Galileo's regretful hope does not make much sense: medical science has always stood at the service of good men and bad men alike. Galileo uses the word "mankind" as though science could establish what is to the benefit of all and so could avoid falling foul of the weakness of individuals. This is an issue fraught with political significance for Brecht, who as a Marxist wanted to believe in a theory of history and of government based upon principles as necessary as those of natural science—thereby eliminating the vulnerability of mankind to the hazards of individual action, and ending the divorce between knowledge and fruition, science and social good. He reduced the role of the hero therefore partly for ideological reasons, but in so doing he achieved this most striking picture of the irrelevance of heroism, of moral qualities good or bad, and of the individual self, to the truths of scientific research.

VII

In conclusion, we may attempt to sum up the extent to which literature and science can be said to have stood together in any meaningful relationship in the 20th century. One end of any scale of assessment must remain fixed by the obvious fact that scientific knowledge has progressed to a point where almost no writer can claim to know much science, and where scientific knowledge is scarcely capable of being translated into literary terms. Dante or Milton or Goethe did not have to regard the resources of human "science" as lying beyond their intellectual competence to grasp. Nor did most writers in the 19th century, although for them the task of coming to terms with a scientific view of the world, whether by way of resistance or acceptance, became rather harder. One reason for this increasing difficulty lay less in the complexity or soullessness of scientific results than in the fading of any clear picture of what the "scientific universe" looks like. Science became a matter more of mental method than of pieces of the world, picked up and possessed like the pebbles that Newton thought mankind, like children, could pick up on the shore. (There is a passage in C. P. Snow's novel *The Search* [1934] that characterizes as the beginning of the end of science the moment when physicists said: "Let us get rid of models altogether. Let us stop thinking of these transcendental objects as though they were ordinary objects we can see and feel. Instead of the transcendental objects, we will have mathematical expressions that will take their place.") Whether as world model, technological device, or state of mind, however, science continued nevertheless to influence the imagination of writers up to the present day; but few can be under any illusion that the world they see is the world that the scientist "sees."

One reaction to this realization, as we have noted, is that followed by Bergson, which rejects the static, fragmenting tendency of scientific understanding in favour of a near-mystical intuition of wholeness. The opposite reaction of Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) should also be noted; his philosophy has none of the imaginative appeal that made Bergson's ideas attractive to writers, but he himself felt an unusual affinity with at least two novelists—Conrad and (more briefly) Lawrence—whose intuition of life seems on the surface quite unlike his own. Russell's mind was extraordinarily open to different kinds of mental experience, from mathematical logic to mysticism, and it is this range of intellectual understanding that enabled him to "place" science and to define its limits. Far from placing it in a metaphysical context of enlarged consciousness, or expanding the dimensions of the self to embrace reality whole, he repeatedly stressed the smallness of the phenomenon of mind in the universe known to science. The bridge he sought to build (to use one of his own images) went in the opposite direction, to link the world of science with the world of sense, not with the world of soul. A truly achieved scientific philosophy would constitute "an imaginative liberation from self," and indeed "dispense with the subject as one of the actual ingredients of the world."[45] The view that there is a "world" at all has little to support it, he wittily remarked, except "prejudice and habit." And in the same account—*The Scientific Outlook* (1931)—we read: "Order, unity, and continuity are human inventions, just as truly as are catalogues and encyclopaedias."

We are fortunately not concerned here with the philosophical problems at the heart of Russell's writing (which even these brief quotations reveal: what *does* the inventing, if "the subject is a logical fiction, like mathematical points and instants"; what *does* the regarding, it if is held "possible to regard both a mind and a piece of matter as logical constructions formed out of materials not differing vitally and sometimes actually identical"?). We need remark only that by this path too, so unlike those followed by Valéry or Mann, or by the many other writers we have discussed, we arrive at a view of science that recognizes its artificial character as "invention," "fiction," "construction." Russell reached far toward the other end of the mental scale, where logic rather than imagination rules, and discovered that "an infinite number of ordering relations exist (in the logical sense), and only reasons of empirical convenience can lead us to select some one among them for special attention."[46] A literary imagination is likely to feel this is not its view of the world, where no better reasons govern the choice of order than "convenience"! Yet all these apparently belittling phrases that Russell uses about the orders of knowledge reflect a consistent refusal to idealize a realm of mental abstraction—in which he had once been tempted to believe—at the expense of life. His negative testimony is important, more important perhaps than the positive, political pleadings of his later years; and so is the instant and indelible mark made upon his mind by his awareness of a daemonic power in Conrad's work and personality. Moreover, Russell's challenging of the traditional norms of certainty upon which not only science but also our habitual, commonsense "world" rests, *has* found its echo in more recent forms of literature, although his own writing may not have influenced them. Two last examples must suffice as illustration: the poetry of Voznesensky, and the "new novel" in France. The image of the world they present contrasts interestingly with most earlier experiments to find styles appropriate to modern experience.

Andrei Voznesensky (b. 1933) found a word that describes better what kind of image he was presenting; it was not, in fact, an image of the world at all, but rather of a number of "anti-worlds"—the title of one of his poems and of the collection (*Antimiry*) he published in 1963. Anti-worlds are, crudely speaking, dreams, ideas, the opposite of what things and people are in themselves. The anti-world of the little clerk is the learned, all-powerful academician. Is this a merely imagined opposition, something that exists only in the head of the clerk? At this point, Voznesensky's inspiration rises above the banality of a poem about phantasy worlds (which is a meaningful expression only if it is clear what a "real" world is) and links all things together, both inner and outer, by means of appositions, contrasts, juxtapositions that are embedded in the grammar, syntax, and rhyme of the poem. Thus, the little clerk is "the colour of blotting-paper" although his dreams are bright: whereas it is the dreams of the academician, rather than his face, that are "the colour of blotting-paper." This use of the same colour (of the same thing) in two opposite contexts, one objective and one subjective, links the two in a common anti-world, for each is the opposite of the other, and therefore they have oppositeness in common. This is not presented as satire against either, but leads to an affirmation of the contrast itself, of anti-worlds, which turn out to be the necessary structure of the world as we know it:

Живет у нас сосед Букашкин,
Бухгалтер цвета промокашки.

Но, как воздушные шары,
Над ним горят
                    Антимиры!
И в них магический, как демон,
Вселенной правит, возлежит,
Антибукашкин, академик,
В объятиях Лоллобриджид.

Но грезятся Антибукашкину
Виденья цвета промокашки.

Да здравствуют Антимиры!

(There lives in our house our neighbour Bukashkin, a clerk the colour of blotting-paper. But like balloons, anti-worlds shine above him. And in them, like a demon, a magic Anti-Bukashkin rules the universe, embraced by Lollobrigidas. But Anti-Bukashkin's dreams are themselves the colour of blotting-paper. Long live anti-worlds!)

In the same style, Voznesensky goes on to say how he loves his critics; they may have an "anti-head," and one of them declares later in the poem that the poet's idea "is rubbish," but precisely this connection between the rubbish of life and phantasy has already been affirmed by the poem itself:

> Люблю я критиков моих.
> На шее одного из них,
> Благоуханна и гола,
> Сияет антиголова!
>
> (I love my critics. On the neck of one of them, fragrant smelling and bald, there shines an anti-head.)

The Russian language lends itself to Voznesensky's juxtaposition of anti-worlds, because the verb "to be," which says that one thing "is" another, is defective and rarely used; connections are established by silent dashes. This is why he imagines his anti-worlds like two people sitting in embarrassed, uncomprehending silence watching television. The simple, simulated "world" on the screen evidently does not bring them lastingly together (were they hoping it would?). "Their first time [is their] last time"—as we might expect of any meeting together of words, any simile or analogy or metaphor, in a poem. And what it means that any two of them should ever have been brought together "will cause a lot of worry afterwards." The unique, perhaps incomprehensible, relationships man brings into being by his thoughts, his anti-worlds, are contrasted at the end with the simple "grasp" of the poet's cat; and what the cat grasps, of course, is not an anti-world, but the world itself, *mir*—rhyming ironically with the poet's "world" (a city room like a cell) where he cannot rest peacefully, but restlessly dreams of his anti-world.

> Я сплю, ворочаюсь спросонок
> В ячейках городских кварир.
>
> Мой кот, как радиоприемник,
> Зеленым глазом ловит мир.
>
> (I sleep, I toss and turn half awake, in the cells of city blocks. My cat, like a radio-receiver, watches the world with his green eye.)

Like many of Voznesensky's poems—which is to say, like most good poetry—*Antimiry* is remarkable for its style rather than for its message. Occasional phrases about "the soul" should not be taken out of context; this text does not reflect a conventional world, focussed, felt, thought, and held by a single lyrical "I." There are as many selves as there are poems, as many "worlds" as there are possibilities of verbal expression. One poem plays with the idea that there are seven, because that number in Russian sounds like the word for a family, a set of relations:

Я — семья.
Во мне как в спектре живут семь «я»,
невыносимых, как семь зверей.
А самый синий
свистит в свирель!

(I am seven. In me as in a spectrum there live seven "I's," as unbearable as seven wild beasts. And the bluest plays a reed pipe.)

Then an association of rhyme with the tritest poetic theme of spring makes the poet dream of an eighth self:

А весной
Мне снится,
что я —
восьмой!

(But in the spring I dream that I am the eighth!)

This particular poem looks conventional perhaps in its self-conscious focus, but much less so in its style: the words are not an expressive record of an experience, but *make* the experience. And what they make us conscious of is not one self but a regression of selves. The lack of "self" control, of a subject distinct from sensation, of a person thinking the experience out, gives to Voznesensky's style an exhilarating movement in which language, with all its resources of analogy, metaphor, association, rhythm, and rhyme, does the thinking. The result, however, is not cerebral poetry in the manner, say, of Mallarmé, but an altogether more sensational text; an anti-world, perhaps, but not an abstract world. There is little similarity with the de-subjectivized techniques used, say, by Ezra Pound (in his *Cantos*) or by T. S. Eliot (in *The Waste Land*); these techniques are fragmentary, and each fragment suggests a once established perspective on the world. Voznesensky's style is not grounded in knowledge about the world or in history, but in a passionate awareness of the present. It is a fleeting, accelerated present, full of meetings and partings; words can describe its infinitely moving relationships but not hold them in any final truth. "We were not born to survive, alas; step on the gas."

The self exists (if at all) in the dimension of time. Voznesensky accelerates the moments that constitute time, in order to discover what they are composed of. In so doing he disintegrates experience, breaking down the barriers between sensation and thought, objective and subjective reality, descriptive and metaphorical terms. The image of the cyclotron, which plays a large part in his poem *Oza* (1964), has an obvious appropriateness for his own experimental technique. The poem is subtitled "Notebook found on the bedside table of a hotel in Dubne," the Soviet atomic research centre (where "my friends are"), and it is characteristic of Voznesensky to introduce at once an element of doubt as to when he "himself" is speaking, where and when the events in the poem take place, and about whom it is talking. Is Oza a girl—the name, perhaps, as the poem repeatedly speculates, of one of the real girls the poet recalls? Oza comes to mean the cyclotron and is changed, like her name, which may be an anagram of Zoa (from the Greek root meaning "life"). Is it life the poet sought in each of those actual girls "like the light behind a photographic slide," and which he changes in his futile attempt to grasp it? The poem begins with a lament that he has ruined her whom he wanted to immortalize, and mocks the Olympian egoist Goethe—he should have said Faust: Goethe was well aware of this paradox*—for wanting to halt the perfect moment. And near the end the poet curses the cyclotron and also himself for having been "the poet of its disintegrating particles." What has the whole enterprise of science, of literature, of man's mental opposition to life been for, when what matters is the thing itself: to live? Already in the middle of the poem the poet has debated with his *alter ego* (who appears in the guise of Poe's "The Raven"!) whether all his marvellous intentions, aspirations, transformations are worth anything at all. The Raven uses the same phrase as the critic in "Anti-worlds," whom Voznesensky thought "was probably right": namely, that it is "all rubbish." The marvellous machines of science have nothing to steer them: just as the well-wrought lines of the poet end in utter separation from the life he loves. His relationship to the girl has been "an attraction of opposites" like that of anti-world to world, of words to life.

VIII

Finally, we may mention the interest of the "new novel" in France for a discussion of the relation of literature to science. Again, we do not look for any specifically scientific knowledge, although Alain Robbe-Grillet

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* See the discussion of this point in Vol. 5, "Irrationalism."

(b. 1922) could surely have produced some from his training in agronomy and statistics. What ultimately counts with regard to the scientific outlook, however (as Russell often stressed), is not its results and its information, but its way of defining what knowledge is: its intellectual method. Robbe-Grillet himself began by describing his novelistic techniques as "descriptive and scientific." He wanted to give an entirely factual account of the things, places, persons, events that constituted a story: a story of adultery (in *La jalousie*, 1957) or of murder (in *Le voyeur*, 1955). What Robbe-Grillet did in the process of detailing these facts, which were all that struck the first generation of his readers, who regarded his technique as pure *chosisme*, was to arrange them in patterns and sequences. These patterns and sequences related the things to one another and gave the impression that the story was unfolding automatically. The independent reality of the subject disappeared, to the extent that the reader may be uncertain whether the jealous husband, for instance, is actually "there." His whole world is there, with the clarity of objects photographed or reflected in a mirror; but the relationship of the person to this world of minutely recorded details is not defined. The conventional notion that art is a mirror held up to nature is challenged by the discovery that, no matter how exact the reflection is, the holding-up of the mirror (and above all the holder) cannot be included in it. If he is thought of as being included in the same reflection, then he will become indistinguishable from it. As a result it is possible to read the text of a Robbe-Grillet novel as a description of events recorded on the screen of an observer's mind; that is, as a totally subjective view of the world.

Robbe-Grillet himself, often working in the medium of the cinema, and becoming absorbed in the theoretical meaning of his own fictional technique, has sometimes seemed ready to accept this subjective view. This implies that the distinction between an objective and a subjective view of the world has ceased to be meaningful. This could be an important discovery, inasmuch as it shows how any such distinction depends on an assumption, which the Western mind has long been in the habit of making, that some outside viewpoint is available to it. The work of Russell in exploring what he called "neutral monism," no less than the fictional technique of Robbe-Grillet, Robert Pinget, and others, represents an attempt to imagine what a truly self-less world of knowledge, not verified or verifiable by an independent witness who can decide how exactly world relates to knowing (so that no reliable distinction can be made between them), would actually look like. But the paradox of course remains: look like to whom? The very effort to "imagine" the world "scientifically" contains an irreducible paradox. Perhaps one can at least express the paradox accurately, as Samuel Beckett has most brilliantly and concisely done in *Imagination dead imagine.* But the more one concentrates on bringing the mental paradox into focus, the more impossible it becomes to know what it is that occurs in any instant of life, above all in the instant of focus.

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15. Many of Valéry's poems symbolize this situation, none perhaps more brilliantly than "Au platane," which is too long to quote and analyse in detail here.
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